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Higher Education and Christian Identity

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Editorial

Higher Education is at a turning point. The developments in economy steered by globalization and political governance impregnated by the ideology of religious nationalism are among the most critical factors affecting the present educational scenario in the country. The loss of secular credentials, the progressive exclusion of the marginal segments of the society from access to higher education, fragmentation of knowledge accompanied by self-seeking pragmatism, loss of social sensitivity and abandoning of humane ideals and values – these loom large as threats to our present educational policies and practices.

Christian presence in our country and in Asia at large has a distinctive visibility through the numerous educational institutions the Churches have been running for about a century and half. The changes in the field of higher education and the challenges they pose, require deeper reflection, and should not be looked at solely from minority rights perspective. Ultimately we need to interrogate the very *raison d'être* of Christian higher educational institutions by rethinking Christian identity in relation to new developments and envisioning the contributions these institutions could make in terms of socially-sensitive educational policies and practices. Most important, however, would be the instilling of noble values and high ideals in the students and the staff, and the creation of an environment conducive to their integral growth in true freedom.

The present issue of *Jeevadhara* brings together some of these concerns, and focuses on selected issues. We are fortunate to have a very high quality of contributions from outstanding educationalists. The contributions of Dr James T. Laney and Dr Patricia B. Licuanan, from the United States and from the Philippines respectively, help us to look at the issue from a global perspective. My contribution goes in the line of relating higher education and Christian identity. We have included the voices of two leading personalities of higher education in the country: Prof. S.N.Hegde in his interview reflects on higher education specially in relation to the developments that have taken place as a result of

globalization; Dr Vasanthi Devi leads us to reflect critically on higher education of women, and how the curricula could be restructured so as to evoke greater social sensitivity and involvement. The final article by Dr. Gnana Patrick examines critically and from a secular point of view some of the new measures being taken and proposals being contemplated to be put into effect in the field of higher education.

I think for some years to come the issue of higher education will remain one of the burning questions. That need not surprise us. As we are engaged in searching for our identity as a nation and chalking out our vision of the future, the prospective shape of higher education is bound to be also an integral part of this quest.

I wish to thank all the writers for their valuable contributions to help us critically reflect on the theme of this number of *Jeevadhara*. I wish to express my thanks in a special way to the competent and reliable assistance given to me by my post-doctoral student Dr Gnana Patrick in preparing this issue, and my appreciation of his serious academic commitment and social involvement.

School of Philosophy and Religious Thought
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Felix Wilfred

Education of Mind and Heart

James T. Laney

The author is a great educationist and former president of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. He served also as the ambassador of U.S.A. in Korea at a very critical time, advocating peace, justice and reconciliation. This message runs through the present contribution in which the author exhorts the institutions of higher education to be centers not only of academic excellence but embodiment of higher values and ideals that go beyond success in life and acquisitiveness. No one need be ashamed of or apologetic about instilling higher values and ideals. The words of the author carries much weight also from the fact that these reflections stem from his own experience of having been the President (Vice-Chancellor) of a renowned university and having attempted to instill among the students and the faculty a noble purpose in life and spirit of service.

Education for the 21st century is in itself a daunting task. We face great challenges and pressures in today's world. For some of us, sheer survival is a daily burden. Add to that the growing expectations society places on us to provide graduates of the highest competence. Students come with set demands for career certification, and are impatient with anything that does not lead directly to wealth and success.

Faculties, likewise as you well know, have heavy career pressures. Success is often defined in terms independent of our institutions; that is, by professional societies. And, at least in the United States, all of this is reinforced by the ubiquitous rankings every year, which are driven by criteria that don't take into account qualities of spirit and moral responsibility. The rankings are like the quarterly earnings of our corporations: if not positive, they can be deadly. Trying to thrive in that world of pressure leaves little time and energy for a "higher calling".

That said, it is not fair to attribute these pressures simply to human venality and ambition. Behind it all there is the push around the world

for progress, for efficiency and profits, both driven by science and technology, all of which carry great authority in today's world. But, while there has been much progress, we are also very much aware that there are enormous inequities and unsolved problems. It is precisely these inequities and unsolved problems that present those of us concerned about how to engender human responsibility among our graduates with our greatest challenge. Globalism confronts us with pluralism and a technology impatient with value-laden issues. But still - there is all the more reason to ask: what authority does our faith offer - authority that is not authoritarian - to affirm that education is more than career certification, that it is intended to change people?

That is our task. It is a large and noble task, namely, to create on our campuses and in our schools and colleges an environment where certain basic moral and spiritual questions and issues can be raised with a sense of permission and welcome. It is well for us to do this without apology, unintimidated by the putative authority wielded by science and careers. Maybe we ought to recall the wisdom of the aphorism attributed to Einstein. "Education is what is left when you've forgotten what you learned." Now, this is not to denigrate learning, but rather to point to a dimension of learning that is left out by the prevailing understanding of learning. This dimension resides in the sinews, in the bones, in the hearts of those who share their lives with us for a while before graduation. Now, all of us, of course, know there was once, and still is in some places, a more structured setting for this kind of learning. Sometimes, it took place intentionally, even coercively, at chapel. Some places had required codes of conduct. But whatever the case, there were clear expectations. It is important for us today, despite our "worldliness" and our sophistication, not to look with condescension upon these efforts.

I remember a time not so long ago when Dr. Benjamin Mays, the revered president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia (the school that arguably has graduated more African American leaders than any other liberal arts college) spoke at least once a week in chapel. He talked to the students about what they ought to become and how they ought to live and what they ought to live for. He was not hesitant. To be sure, not all those who heard him were affected and I'm sure some scoffed and some slept. But one person heard him and that person changed history. Martin Luther King, Jr., attributes much of his faith and courage and his

vision of a new world to those chapel services when he sat before Mays. Well, those days may be long past and we may not have those kinds of opportunities. But we need, and we will discuss how, to find ways to place before our students and our colleagues certain inescapable fundamental moral issues and imperatives. In doing so, we can create on our campuses an atmosphere receptive to the pondering of - maybe even commitment to - major moral issues. We can provide an alternative to the often-uncritical adoption of the meretricious values that so dominate modern culture with its corrosive individualism and unbridled acquisitiveness.

Noble talk, you might say. The pluralism and the authority of technology are intimidating. What right do we have to challenge them? And do we have the authority to do so? The mode of our authority may not necessarily be the same as that of the past. We need to understand our tradition and heritage in a way that is not imperialistic or aggressive, but in such a way that it can confidently and generously alter a vision of the world beyond the classroom, beyond much-needed techniques and disciplines. We want a new generation of students to see that inhabiting the atmosphere and the climate - the ethos - of that vision can introduce them to a culture of concern and an appreciation of a world that needs their skills and commitment, but also their dedication.

What are these concerns? There are many, but let me briefly mention three. All three come directly out of the Bible. They are critical components of our Christian faith, but offering them is not meant to be exclusive. The three concerns are justice, reconciliation, and service. We hope that by bringing these concerns before a generation that is going forth into some kind specialized work, some particular life, it would enable them to catch some sense of what it might mean for them, how God might be speaking to them for their lives.

The prophet Amos says, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). Ordering human affairs in a way that is fair and just is written into the heart of creation by God. A campus built on justice will not only deal with all equitably, but will offer equality of opportunity to all who can come; that is, it will be truly inclusive. And in an era of globalization, inclusion should obviously go beyond our national borders in order to break down cultural separation. Now, in the United States in particular, there is great

debate over affirmative action. Some, in an attempt to curry favor or because they are bending to outside pressure, reduce affirmative action to "political correctness". But when one does justice one is not currying favor but one is doing what is right. To include those who would otherwise not have opportunity is to establish the fundamental premise of justice.

To give a personal example: I was one of the first "affirmative-action" students fifty - six years ago. After the Second World War, Yale University wanted to become truly a national university and to attract students beyond the self-appointed elite that had gone to the expensive prep schools in the eastern United States. And so, it offered a generous scholarship program across the country to students who would not have qualified competitively according to entrance exams. But Yale took a gamble on us and we were admitted, thus beginning a new chapter in opportunity. Similarly, that kind of opportunity must be extended to all students who have promise, that we might erase the inequalities that wealth and elitism - yes, and race - present. All of us are becoming international; and so inclusiveness on our campuses is a foretaste of a more global society, in which we learn to live together in fairness and learn to appreciate one another. There is a telling argument that has been presented by the two richest men in the world against entrenched privilege. The United States has recently enacted a tax cut that, if sustained, will abolish inheritance taxes. Warren Buffett and Bill Gates (two of the richest men in the world) spoke out against this, saying that to abolish inheritance taxes will in effect perpetuate through generations existing entrenched privilege. They said it would be like having the next generation of Olympic participants drawn only from the children of past Olympic champions. Just as the Olympics must be open to all if we are to get the best teams, so must opportunity in life be fairly open to all. It is this kind of openness and inclusiveness that our campuses need to embody.

The issue of justice is, of course, based on the issue of fundamental human rights. Former President Jimmy Carter made this a part of his administration saying that foreign policy must take human rights into account as a major criterion for world affairs. Hardheaded realists

at the time, particularly those in the United States, denounced President Carter as naive. And he left office very much discouraged.

Karl Deutsch from Harvard University met Jimmy Carter one day on the Emory campus, right after he was defeated, "Mr. President, it is an honor to meet you. I know how you feel today, but I want to tell you that, from my view of history, in a thousand years your name will still be recalled, because you were the first person ever to introduce human rights as a major element of foreign policy." Carter had tears in his eyes, as you might imagine. But what Carter had done was more than prophetic. He appreciated that as the world becomes interrelated, it must incorporate a fundamental structure of justice or we will be torn apart. And that structure of justice rests on fairness for each human being.

But Justice involves more than fairness, more than inclusion. The incredible inequality between rich and poor nations has got to be addressed. It is not enough for our graduates to be given the opportunity to succeed. They must also be given the opportunity to understand how we can work to alleviate the misery, illness, and poverty that bind down so many of the world's children. This means understanding how the power and innovation of the developed world can work to the advantage of the world - to help young leaders envision a world where justice prevails, and to use their newly acquired mastery to achieve it.

Beyond justice is reconciliation. The need is everywhere - on the Korean peninsula, between Catholics and Protestants, Muslims and Jews, in the Middle East, in Africa, all places where people find it very hard not to want vindication and vengeance. "Vengeance is mine, I will recompense", says the Lord (Deut. 32:35). We need to teach students this. The work of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and President Nelson Mandela in South Africa shows that this kind of reconciliation can actually work. No one thought it could work. Too much blood had been spilled and the need for revenge was too great. And yet, they were able to bring in a process of truth and reconciliation - imperfect, to be sure - but at least it averted the bloodbath that might have occurred otherwise. Emory University recently spent a year discussing and examining the issue of reconciliation in its many aspects. The effort really began to germinate across the campus. Scientists, physicians, people in the humanities, law, business, and in theology all discussed and thought about ways to live together in this world. What do our disciplines have

to offer to teach us how we might do that? While the importance of reconciliation in the world cannot be overstated, it must begin on our campuses, which often themselves are riven by racial and religious conflict and division. How can we show that it is possible for people to live with their differences with integrity and do so in peace, mutual affirmation, and care? We can only do it through the biblical injunction of forgiveness. Hannah Arendt, in looking back on the Holocaust, remarked, "The one truly creative human act is an act of forgiveness". That is, forgiveness breaks the cycle that turns us on the spit of hatred and revenge and allows healing and consolation to occur. This can take place in face to face efforts on campuses if we provide the impetus and leadership that then becomes a foundation of experiential learning for later life.

The rise of terrorism around the world only dramatizes the desperate straits some are prepared to go to. The fight against terrorism is front and center, certainly for the U.S., but the greater struggle is to address the hatred and bitterness that thrive in so many parts of the world. While our campuses are not equipped nor qualified to solve these problems, they can and must seek to understand the root causes and how to address them. And to the extent religious divisions exist on our campuses, we are provided with a laboratory for possible means to resolve the terrorism and work toward reconciliation.

Finally, there is the issue of service. Jesus told his disciples that the Gentiles exercised authority by lording it over others, but that it must not be so among them (Matt. 20:25). Instead, "whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave", Jesus said (Matt. 23:26-27). All of our Christian colleges, of whatever denomination, were founded to serve the common good, to educate students for more than simply personal benefit. Today, many of these colleges have become great engines of accreditation and certification. The stakes and the standards are high, resulting in a pervasive sense of entitlement. Students are impatient to get what they think they deserve as a result of their work. This makes it all the more essential for us to create an atmosphere where they are exposed to the need of the world, where they can be involved in service learning and begin to understand what servant leadership is all about. To be sure, not every student will respond, but many will. Who knows,

there may be in our midst and on your campus another Martin Luther King, Jr. It is the possibility for this that gives us hope. Many of us remember when President John F. Kennedy, hardly one of our most idealistic presidents, nevertheless established the Peace Corps at the height of the Cold War. It electrified a younger generation by simply saying, "You can go into another culture and by living there make a contribution." I am sure there were mistakes made in carrying out this program, and I am sure occasional arrogance attended the idea. Nevertheless, the Peace Corps inspired a younger generation not only in the United States but also in many other countries. I recall vividly how a group of medical and nursing students in Korea were inspired to form the *Veneratio Vitae* club, the "reverence for life" club. Every weekend they visited a poor village and provided a range of services and worship. This not only addressed their needs, it was a powerful example for all. Service learning provides an experience through internships that offer students the possibility of doing something that is beyond themselves, something noble. It shows them the possibility of servant leadership and helps them appreciate the notion that power and mastery have purposes beyond self-aggrandizement. This kind of power is not about vindication or shoving others around. It has nothing to do with the swagger and the bluster and the vanity and the ego of life. This lesson is of critical importance because our graduates are going to become heads of institutions, businesses and of churches. In addition to high competence, the one thing that we need to expose them to before they graduate is the meaning of humility in the exercise of power. It is absolutely incumbent upon us to do this. Millions of people are oppressed by the abuse of power because their leaders have never learned and appreciated the fact that what our gospel teaches us is that the purpose of having power is to *serve*. Let us never be ashamed or timid to set this idea before our students.

If we can make some progress in this, there will follow a commensurate influence in our national life of how power and moral authority are distinguished. Despite claims to the contrary, power is not self-justifying. Only when it is linked to a larger, more inclusive good does it carry moral authority. That is why peace and justice must be the end goals of any use of power. Only then will power prove to be constructive. Our graduates will some day be leaders - even of their countries. We can see in today's world so many reasons why this understanding is critical for us all.

We, each of us, have a glorious opportunity to make our institutions distinctive as moral and spiritual places. If we do so, they will attract people who already have an incipient longing for that kind of education. (Max Weber called that "elective affinity"). Moreover, I am convinced, contrary to those who think it cannot be done, that there are people with financial means who want to help sponsor such programs and such education. There is a cadre of people around the world who have been touched by our churches, who believe that it is important that moral education be given to the next generation. By inculcating the three principles of concern on our campuses - justice, reconciliation, and a sense of servant leadership - we have the opportunity to show the world in its need that there is a generation that cares, that the scourges of poverty, AIDS, and violence can be reduced and that the divisions among nations and peoples of the world can be healed. And as importantly, we have the opportunity to show the way for the rich nations to participate, practically and meaningfully, in building a juster, more peaceful world.

Each one of us has a great calling, one that can be fulfilled. I hope and pray that we may find in these times together concrete ways to share, so that our campuses may really reveal the meaning of the kind of concern and Christian hope I am speaking about.

Vocation of Christian Educators: Christian Responsibility in Academia

Patricia B. Licuanan

Discussing the challenges to education and educators in the changed global scenario of today, the author - principal of a well-known women's college in Manila, Philippines - highlights some very important issues. One such issue is what she calls the unintended "hidden curriculum" in an educational institution that exists side by side the formal curriculum. The hidden curriculum could be seen in the values which an educational institution rewards (for example submissiveness and conformity) and the attitudes and behaviour it reprimands and punishes (for example assertiveness, innovation, etc). It could be also seen in the kind of people the institution invites to speak and the role model it presents. The author also highlights the crucial importance of empowering women educationally in our Asian countries. The author also addresses the important role educators are called upon to play by taking up their role as a vocation, and by bridging the gap between their life and work.

This paper will first attempt to contextualize the work of Christian educators by describing the defining characteristics of the world and times in which we work. The challenges to Christian education will then be discussed. The vocation of Christian educators and Christian responsibility in academia will flow from these challenges of the 21st century.

The Context of Our Work

A World of Change

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of these times is rapid and far-reaching change. Change is most obvious in the domains of politics, economics, technology and culture. In politics, authoritarian regimes

are progressively shifting to more democratic, pluralistic systems in many parts of the developing world particularly in the Asian region. This development toward liberal democracy has opened up channels for broader-based people participation in political, economic as well as social areas.

Economic liberalization and the dominance of market forces and private enterprise are major trends contributing to the development of a global economy characterized by worldwide expansion of trade and transport, flows of capital and investment and liberalization of financial markets. The new global business landscape is a world of global corporations, global jobs, global consumers and global products. Knowledge is the new global product. In place of the traditional, tangible goods of the manufacturing economy, intangible products such as ideas, processes, information are taking a growing share of trade in the global marketplace.

Fast-paced technological change particularly in such areas as communications, electronics, biotechnology, computers and robotics are inventing new products, wiping out old jobs and creating new ones in their place, revolutionizing work relations and practically removing distance as a consideration in any activity.

And media's impact on all aspects of contemporary life is another characteristic of today's world. While print media has grown in importance, the major revolution has taken place in television and video and the internet which transmit images and messages to millions of people all over the world and have become powerful instruments of a growing global culture.

A World in Crisis

The new world we face this century is also a world in crisis. It is characterized by conflict - large-scale and small - hostilities between states, civil and ethnic wars and conflicts between groups and individuals unable to manage differences. Asia has its share of conflicts. China and Taiwan are gearing up and threatening military action; the old conflict between India and Pakistan may yet become the world's first nuclear war; the separatist conflicts in Indonesia and the Philippines continue. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States were horrifying but the killing of innocent civilians in Afghanistan was equally appalling.

Despite marked increase in environmental awareness, human beings continue to threaten our air and water and forests and other natural resources. The gap between rich and poor - whether countries or people - is dramatically widening. Globalization has its winners and losers with poor women being the biggest losers with feminization of overseas employment, heightened commodification of women in media and expansion of trafficking in women.

And the family is endangered. Too many children - whether because of poverty, discord between their parents, abuse or the demands of day to day life and work - are dislocated or alienated from their families. And there is the crisis of the spirit - widespread materialism, growing cynicism and mounting priority given to selfish interests over community and the common good.

A World of Opportunity

But while the world we work in is in crisis, it is also a world of immense possibilities. Science and technology have extended lifespans, shrunk time and space, and made information available to all who seek it. The rules of power and advantage have been changed expanding opportunities in business beyond the established elite to other players such as young entrepreneurs with less resources. New knowledge is a powerful resource driving economic development.

But the most exciting and empowering breakthroughs in the next century may not be in technology but rather in our concepts of what it means to be human. Developments in cyberspace are matched by breakthroughs in "inner space". For instance the new understanding of human abilities, seeing intelligence differently - from a general intelligence factor to the notion that there are abilities that we are not tapping into; an appreciation for skills beyond the traditional IQ, reflected in the concepts of multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence or EQ.

Emphasis on people participation and people power, consultative and participatory decision-making and teamwork are challenging traditional social hierarchies and democratizing access to influence and power. And when problems seem too enormous to do anything about, one must learn from the fact that some of the most stubborn social practices such as discrimination, feudalism, patriarchy and others are

slowly changing through the action of committed, organized and empowered groups.

The Millennium Challenge

What then are educational demands of a world characterized by change, crisis and opportunity? What are the challenges to Christian colleges and universities presented by today's world?

Leading Change

Millennium educators have to be leaders of change. Organizations and individuals will be forced to learn, change and constantly reinvent themselves in the 21st century. The ability to handle change requires openness to new ideas; risk-taking or the willingness to push oneself out of comfort zones; humble self-reflection or honest assessment of successes and failures, particularly the latter; aggressive collection of information, ideas and opinions from others; and careful listening. These times of redefinition and shifts require institutions and individuals who not only deal with change but who can create and communicate vision and strategies. These times require flexibility, quick reaction, time and a persistent sense of urgency.

The challenge of change also demands of educators the courage, strength of character and sense of mission to be advocates for change, to address what should and can be changed. Whether the issue is the carrying capacity of the earth or the caring capacity of people, the economy or the political culture, educational standards or the status of women, law and order or graft and corruption - our institutions and those who teach in them must be willing to face problems squarely and lead our students in search for appropriate solutions. Our schools not only have to respond to change but have to develop the built-in capacity for responding to change.

The Challenge of Synergy and Building Bridges

The challenge of synergy involves bringing together and working with new combinations of factors and forces for greater impact and finding the right balance between important but often competing realities. Our colleges and universities have to creatively combine change with continuity, globalization with cultural rootedness, the sacred and the secular, technology and human relations, work and family. In a world

full of gaps and divisions between and among groups, Christian colleges and universities have to act as bridges between important segments of society.

Traditional and Contemporary

The Church is rich in history and tradition but it has to be part of the modern world. Our institutions have a crucial role to play in linking the Christian faith to the core elements in contemporary culture. Because of our intrinsic link with young people, we have to be modern and “with it”, facing the realities of the times and painfully but courageously searching for the appropriate response. Christian colleges and universities should seek the synthesis between adaptation to their surroundings and fidelity to its original mission. We should review our spiritual heritage in order to place it with enthusiasm and conviction at the service of new generations. Our rhythm and tempo should be simultaneously that of tradition and innovation, the detachment of metaphysics and the urgency of technical solutions demanded by a society faced with many problems.

Technology and Culture

We must meet the modern challenge of the interface between technology and culture. Our institutions must remain focused on the human side of rapid technological change and emphasize the primordial importance of human communication while using modern machines as our tools. Our colleges and universities have to help link Asian culture which puts much importance on the total environment or context (history, status, relationships, space, emotions, etc.) in interpreting communication with the seemingly impersonal and context-less technology of e-mail and the internet.

Sacred and Secular.

One of the contemporary realities we have to deal with is a world that is growing more and more secular. Our institutions have to understand the secular world we live in and speak its language if we are to convert it. We must combine an awareness of modern secular realities with a careful listening to the “voice of God”. We have to fight a dual battle against both the evils of a growing religious fundamentalism and the evils of a totally materialistic, hedonistic and godless society. Christian colleges and universities should help the Church lead effectively in a secular world, facing the realities of contemporary problems and issues with pastoral care and compassion. We should

develop and communicate a perspective that distinguishes between accepting the existence of a problem and condoning it. Christian institutions have to learn to deal with the many human realities that exist in this modern world and in the day to day lives of our students. What is our response to such concrete realities as family violence, sexual abuse, divorce or separation.

Work and Family

The integration of work, personal and family life and community involvement in new and different configurations remains a major challenge of the times. Our institutions have to help movement from the underlying conception that work and private life are separate and inherently adversarial to the creation of family friendly workplaces where work and family are integrated and mutually supportive spheres.

Masses and Elite

In accordance with the social teachings of our churches, our institutions should be powerful advocates for the poor and marginalized in our societies. We must develop and experiment with centers and offices on our campuses that will act as mediating structures to help empower the masses economically, politically and psychologically. Christian colleges and universities should provide the analysis necessary to critically view globalization and economic growth in the region and call attention to the problems of uneven growth and the dark side of globalization. Through formal courses as well as through non-classroom activities students should be helped to become aware of the social realities that the more privileged are shielded from. Our institutions have the responsibility to give their attention and support not only to the obvious winners but also to the losers generally overlooked in the development race. We should develop programs for and respond to not only growing markets which usually represent sectors able to actively compete in the free market and in the global economy. We should also lend an attentive ear to the muted voices of the weak and vulnerable who do not represent markets for our programs in the usual sense but most definitely represent a need to which we have the responsibility to respond.

Different Religions and Cultures

Our institutions must bridge the differences that divide people. We must take special care not to unwittingly or subliminally pass on the prejudices and biases of one generation to the next but instead should

act as agents of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. As bridges between religious groups and as agents of inter-religious dialogue, our schools should counteract the prevailing insensitivity toward other religions. In most Asian countries the challenge lies in asserting one's Christian identity in a context that is different and at times hostile. In the Philippines, there is often the insensitivity of the dominant religious culture to the sensibilities of members of minority religions. More and more, we should encourage prayers and rituals that are inter-faith in nature or use inclusive language. These simple gestures of acknowledgement and respect for other religions are basic to any inter-religious dialogue.

Laboratories of Christian and Human Values

All Christian schools teach values particularly through our religion classes where we teach love of God and our neighbor and preach conformity to religious, moral and social values. The most common criticism of these attempts to teach values as part of the formal curriculum in our institutions, is that the approaches used are mainly cognitive and thus values taught are often not really internalized. Recently, more experiential approaches have been introduced featuring exposure trips and personal reflections. As agents of renewal, our Christian colleges and universities have to ensure the effective teaching of values not merely through the formal curriculum but specially through the informal or hidden curriculum present in our institutions.

While we attempt to teach desirable values through the formal system, we should be aware of the fact that other values may in fact be operating on campus. This hidden curriculum operating parallel to the formal system may totally neutralize formal efforts or may actually prove to be a superior force. As agents of renewal, Christian educators have to guarantee congruence between formal and hidden curriculum, between words and action, between theory and practice. In other words, we must practice what we preach.

The hidden curriculum is the unintended shaping of values and behavior through the psychological processes of reward and punishment and role modeling or the imitation of significant persons such as teachers and administrators. The danger from the hidden curriculum lies less in the teaching of obviously destructive values such as dishonesty or injustice (although there are instances where these are taught as well).

But there are many other values whose potential harm is less obvious, which are systematically, though informally, taught in our institutions.

For instance, conformity and submissiveness are taught by systematically rewarding politeness, civility and obedience and ignoring or actually punishing curiosity, critical thinking, initiative and assertiveness by using fear, disapproval and imposition of authority. How then can we expect the products of our institutions to explore the unknown and break new ground in science or entrepreneurship or service or any area of endeavor? How will they dare take the road less traveled by and make a difference?

Materialism, the desire for more and the escalation of needs may be taught under the guise of the legitimate values of security and the motive for economic betterment. Through their continuous emphasis on earning a living, marketability and material gain, our institutions may become effective laboratories of the profit motive. The idea that a person should work for as much material advancement as possible can lead to compromise in gray areas and may eventually lead to the rampant corruption we see around us. By setting up as models (through examples used in courses, people invited to school functions, guest speakers, awardees, etc.) mainly those who have improved their lives materially, the hidden curriculum may in fact be teaching that those who do not become rich are less successful or accomplished.

Are our Christian colleges and universities proper laboratories of the work ethic, standards and accountability? Of social responsibility and involvement? Of Christian charity and the golden rule? What kind of role models are we to the students whose lives we influence?

The Challenge of Empowerment

Christian colleges and universities have to be genuine instruments of empowerment. Through our structures and processes, through our formal and informal curricula, through human resource development programs and through the organizational culture that dominates in our schools and through our outreach and advocacy, we can contribute significantly to the growth and development of all sectors in our schools as well as key sectors in society.

We must set up structures and processes that are transparent, unbureaucratic and participatory where people are genuinely valued and encouraged to contribute. One might ask how differences are handled

on our campuses, how we deal with student, faculty and staff dissent or protest. Do we sincerely respect people's right to speak out and express what they believe in? If we do not, how then can we develop active and responsible citizens who are willing to solve problems and right the wrongs of society?

Empowerment of the Youth

Empowerment of the youth begins with an understanding of the contemporary realities of youth and families. In Asia there is an alarmingly increasing number of young people growing up without parents because of marital split-ups and overseas employment; the diminishing of the quality of family time due to the demands of day to day life and work. And we must not be blind to the secret crimes of domestic violence and child abuse. In a world of increasing parent absence and family problems, we must set up the structures that enable our institutions to give more personal attention to students. We must choose and train our administrators, teachers, homeroom teachers, counselors, club/activity moderators, chaplains/campus ministers, office staff, librarians and others to be positive and facilitating persons who will help the adolescents and young adults in our care to recognize their competence and develop their self-esteem and self worth.

We must respond to students' legitimate concerns, i.e., that of securing their professional future and obtaining work and an income which enables them to live reasonably but at the same time seeking answers to questions of philosophy and humanism that go beyond a particular profession or field - to create a balanced "me" that will live at peace with themselves and with others and will participate actively in shaping their world.

Genuine Human Resource Development

Our Christian colleges and universities should lead by word and deed in the empowerment of faculty and staff. Our policies and programs must be designed to expand opportunities for our faculty and all employees to grow professionally and personally. The empowerment of our teaching and non-teaching personnel starts with the recognition of different needs at different stages of one's career - from the time of entry until the time of retirement. A genuine human resource development program must be designed and implemented to meet needs at different seasons of one's life and career. And most of all our

institutions should work hard to be loving and supportive communities convinced of the nobility of our cause and the importance of our mission and truly appreciative of all who work in this corner of the Lord's vineyard.

Empowerment of Women

Our institutions should be serious and dedicated supporters and defenders of women's rights and empowerment. The issues of the basic inequality between women and men, the oppression and violence suffered by women as well as the valuable contribution made by women at home and in society should be standard areas for discussion and study in our schools. Instead one notices a certain discomfort and at times even hostility in some church sectors to even discuss women's issues unless couched in careful ecclesial language. Christian colleges and universities particularly working in a region characterized by great inequalities between men and women must join the global advocacy against: the feminization of poverty; unequal access to education, training, health care and related services; inequality between women and men in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels; violence against women; lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women.

We must challenge our institutions to be actors in an enlightened global movement. Are women truly full and equal partners in our institutions? Do young women have equal access to our schools? Do women faculty and administrators enjoy equal prospects for successful and fulfilling careers? Are we aware of and do we speak up against discrimination against women or are we silent accomplices? What are we doing to counteract the strong son-preference still prevalent in many of our societies? Responses to this challenge have taken the form of Women's Studies or Gender Studies courses or programs. Attempts to review admissions policies for students as well as recruiting and placement policies for faculty and administrators for possible gender bias would be essential. Gender analysis of development programs and policy advocacy are other forms of initiatives from academic institutions as are special training programs focusing in developing marketable skills for low-income women.

Our institutions can meet these millennium challenges - change, synergy, values and empowerment - through our various functions of teaching and training, research, extension and advocacy.

Vocation of Christian Educators

Faculty are the major instruments through which our Christian colleges and universities function and through which we can properly meet the challenges of the new millennium. While the challenges discussed above referred to challenges to the entire institution, individual members of the community also have to commit themselves to meeting these challenges of leading change, developing synergy and building bridges, being role models of Christian and human values and being instrument for the empowerment of key groups. What are the qualities that our institutions should look for and develop in members of the faculty?

Academic Excellence

The religious character of our institutions should never be a substitute for genuine intellectual activity. Christian educators should possess high standard academic credentials and accomplishments. The fact that aside from academic excellence, our mission statements generally focus on themes of development of the human person, community service and justice, is no excuse for mediocrity in scholarship. Two important points should be raised in relation to academic excellence and faculty scholarship. The first has to do with the range of types of scholarship and research which our faculty might pursue: basic research or the scholarship of discovery; scholarship of integration; scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching. The second important point is for academic excellence to be grounded in the mission and vision of the institution and not simply be driven by competitiveness or external measures.

Commitment to the Common Good

Christian educators have to be committed to the common good. Admittedly, what constitutes “the common good” is often open to interpretation and even dispute. In a beautiful book called “Common Fires: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World”, the core elements of “common good” were identified:

“... a global scope, a recognition of diversity, and a vision of society as composed of individuals whose well-being is inextricably bound up with the good of the whole. Increasingly and necessarily, “the common good” refers to the well-being of the whole earth community - its safety,

the integrity of basic institutions and practices, and the sustaining of the living systems of our planet home. The common good also suggests broadly shared goals toward which the members of the community strive - human flourishing, prosperity, and moral development. A recognition of the common good thus casts light on the significance of openness to new learning, critical and systemic thought, and the search for "right naming"- images, metaphors, language - that convey the deepest truths of our common life".

A Life of Faith

Christian educators must participate actively in a life of faith. This essentially means a deep link between spirituality and one's work, between faith and work. Christian educators should view themselves as co-creators of God's kingdom. In these modern and secular times it is not unusual for people to be shy and almost apologetic about their faith. Christian educators should be eloquent role models of the central role that faith and prayer should play in the most modern and "trendy" of lives. They should manifest as well an ethical congruence between life and work, a certain seamlessness between what they profess and how they lived. Our Christian educators, while inevitably imperfect, should be recognized as reasonably good and decent human beings.

Education as Vocation

Christian educators should view their work not simply as a job, not even simply as a career but as a vocation. One could have a good job, a successful career but lack a vocation - a deeper calling, an investment of one's being. A vocation is a commitment that sustains people, that brings growth and pride and love. While there may be some pain and definitely a lot of hard work, work in our Christian colleges and universities must for the most part be viewed not as duty or self-sacrifice but as springing from love and and bearing fruit of joy and fulfillment.

Mentoring

In the course of our educational experiences, there have been good and great teachers. Then there are the teachers we never forget. These teachers are probably what might be called transformational mentors. These are to be distinguished from transactional mentors. The terms transformational and transactional are drawn from the literature on leadership but when applied to mentorship, they have a somewhat

different meaning. Most mentors are transactional mentors - people with whom one has meaningful transactions. The mentor is professionally and personally supportive, a source of advice, a sounding board when needed, a helper in times of distress. The transformational mentor is all of these things, plus something more. He or she inspires, reveals new ways of understanding professional and personal matters, and motivates one to transcend who one is to become a different kind of professional and, perhaps, person. There is no one formula for becoming a transformational mentor but Christian educators should capitalize on their individual strengths to find ways to enter this role.

Bringing Hope

These are difficult times and there is widespread negativism and cynicism. Christian colleges and universities should help people see in these difficult times the continuing challenge facing those who are truly committed to a better world. Too much criticism and fault-finding can be unconstructive and a waste of energy. This does not mean that we should ignore the serious problems that exist. What it does mean is that through the real difficulties and problems, through the genuine imperfections of leaders and through infuriating quirks of culture, we should still be able to recognize the good that does exist around us, identify solutions and most important, commit ourselves to a definite role in specific and constructive action. Christian educators have to be and should help their students to be a critical voice, demanding the best of our government, our institutions, our culture, ourselves. But ultimately, to be always a voice of hope.

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Rethinking Christian Identity in Global Process

Implications for Asian Christian Higher Education

Felix Wilfred

This article is a slightly revised version of the address the author delivered at a recent conference of the United Board of Christian Higher Education for Asia, held at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The approach to Christian higher education depends on the way Christian identity is perceived. The article goes into the developments in the perception of the Christian self-identity in contemporary times. It is followed by some reflections on the need of developing Christian identity through a process of prophecy and integration. In the final part of the article the author goes into some of the characteristics deriving from the universal message of the Gospel and shows how these should inspire and guide also the process of Christian Higher Education. The author weaves into his reflections the dialectical relationship between knowledge and power and underlines the intrinsic goal of knowledge for freedom and emancipation. The article calls for a re-orientation of education and educational policies in favour of the poor, and cautions against the dominant trend of education catering to the demands of global capitalism.

What is it that constitutes Christian educational institutions? Where are we to find our Christian identity? These and similar questions we have not failed to ask, especially when confronted with some critical issues and problems. When teaching various disciplines in their most specialized forms according to global standards, we begin to ask at certain moments: What is the difference between us and others doing the same kind of specialized teaching? We follow the same course of studies, collect the same fees, compete for the same kind of public recognition. But where is the "*Christian*" in all these? This could be quite a disturbing question for many of us.

We can comfort ourselves that Christian educators are not alone in raising the question of identity. A number of individual Christians and groups involved at the grassroots level confront the same problem. Do we need to have a Christian identity in our involvement for the transformation of the society? If so, what would that consist in? There are Christians who, while being committed to the poor and the marginalized, would not like to be identified as Christians, even though personally they confess their faith in Christ and would acknowledge that what they do is inspired by the Gospel. There is a serious concern that an external Christian identity might even jeopardize their work.

The problem of Christian identity is a general one. We want to reflect on this issue in relation to education. In earlier times, missionaries posed the question of identity. For some, the answer for Christian identity was easy; for others, it was a problematic one. If we go into the history of Christian educational institutions, we will find, how much this question divided the missionaries.¹ We also will not fail to note that there has been an evolution and development in the understanding of Christian identity in relation to educational institutions.

We need to respond to the issue of identity in Asia in the context of the more recent developments – the global process at political, cultural, social and economic levels. The new developments have brought about new factors and forces which need to be taken into account in the consideration of the identity-issue. The problems ensuing from globalization leads us to raise once again the question of Christian identity in a new context and in a new historical situation. Particularly the homogenization it has brought about in the educational field with its standard patterns, leads us to ask whether anything specifically “Christian” could be thought of.

I. Approaches to Christian Identity

There is a general and widespread understanding of Christian identity, which is bound up with some external marks.² Accordingly, *membership*

1 With regard to India, see J.C. Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India. Issues in Protestant Missionary Education in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ISPCK, Delhi, 2000.

2 On the general problematic of identity in relation to communities, see one of the numbers of *Jeevadhara* (January 2001) edited by me and entitled: *Communities and Identity-Consciousness*.

in one of the Churches would be the most obvious form of fixing one's Christian identity. For others, it would be some of the *basic tenets* which would constitute the Christian identity. Some would highlight certain doctrines, as for example, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his Lordship, faith in the Trinity, etc. And still for others, the Christian identity is a matter of a particular *mode of behaviour and attitude*.³ Often times, these perceptions of the Christian marks of identity overlap. They do not represent pure types. Further, one may not think of these approaches as matters of the past. They are still prevalent and operative in our times. They come to expression when discussing about the Christian identity of educational institutions. Some do not want to probe deeper into the question. For them the fact that an educational institution is run by the Church would make it automatically Christian. For others, certain attitudes and practices within the campus of an educational institution would make it Christian.

These approaches to Christian identity have serious limitations. They represent so to say an *objective approach*, positivist in spirit. We have here a resemblance of the way an archeologist would identify the nature of an excavated object and determine its period of origin. The identity is fixed and thought to be complete for ever.

Challenges to the Traditional Approaches to Christian Identity

Now, this kind of approach to Christian identity has been challenged by the developments both in the West and in our parts of the world. As for the West, the traditional kind of identity-marking could go along with a homogenous Christian society, as was the case in medieval Christendom. But further developments indicate that for a growing number of people, group-membership, or subscribing to a set of doctrines or conforming to certain practices appear to be too restrictive to their search for what it is to be a Christian. They find themselves in a situation of conflict between the given Christians identity and their personal quest to follow the Gospel. Many of them resolve this conflict by denying their Christian *identity by ascription* while they continued their search. Further, the process of secularization has challenged the traditional "objective" ways of marking Christian identity, and has introduced a

3 Buehler, "Christian Identity: Between Objectivity and Subjectivity", in *Concilium* No. 196 (1988) pp. 17-27.

fluid way of looking at religious identity.⁴ In the contemporary period, under the influence of modernity and postmodernity, more and more people would like to do what is called “*believing without belonging*” (Grace Davie).

Today, the all-comprehensive role religion played in traditional society has given place to a situation in which religion plays but one function among many others, while people experience multiple belonging at different levels.⁵ A new consciousness of the situation of religious pluralism in Asia and the same situation created in western societies through the process of globalization and migration, has turned the question of Christian identity into a problematic one. People do not think in terms of incompatibility when it is the question of ultimate realities. In traditional understanding, if one is X, he or she cannot be Y. But globalization has made it that one can share in many worlds without belonging to any one in particular.

Rethinking Christian Identity

The crisis caused by the developments through many factors, and in recent times through the process of globalization has led us to a serious rethinking on our Christian identity.⁶ On the other hand, globalization has only helped to discover what has been always a practice in our Asian societies, namely the sharing in many religious worlds in the quest for the Ultimate. This latter point of quest needs to be underlined to distinguish it from a syncretism prompted by religious curiosity and novelty. The fluidity of religious borders beckons us to approach the question of Christian identity in ways other than we have been used to. These ways, it looks to me, have been conditioned much more than we may imagine, by the Western liberal and individualistic tradition. The development of Christian identity in a rigid fashion has been concomitant

4 Cf. Karl Gabriel, *Christentum zwischen Tradition und Postmoderne*, Herder, Freiburg, 1992; Peter Huenermann, *Das neue Europa . Herausforderungen fuer Kirche und Theologie*, Herder, Freiburg, 1993.

5 Cf. Catherine Cornille (ed.), *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, Orbis Books, New York, 2002.

6 This crisis need not surprise us. Christian identity-construction has been a struggle also in the early period of Christianity as illustrated by the relationship of early disciples of Jesus to Judaism.

with the development of the identity of the individual in the Western liberal tradition. The paradigm of the identity of the individual has been transported to define the Christian identity. Consequently, similar to the identity of the individual, Christian identity is defined in terms of what differentiates it from others. In this connection, when the identity-question of Christian educational institutions and their specificity was posed, it was this latter paradigm of defining Christian identity which was at work.

In Asia, we need to begin to think of Christian identity in terms of relationship rather than differentiation. A person in our societies is not defined as an individual in contradistinction to others. A person is best defined in our cultures and traditions when he or she is placed within the network of relationship, as for example, when we speak of X in relation to Y in one or other *form of relationship* (for example, aunt, niece, mother, sister, sister-in-law). The nature of this relationship of X to Y defines both X and Y. That offers us the clue as to where we need to place the accent when we speak of Christian identity. The logical principle of non-contradiction may not find application in identity-understood in terms of relation, since relationship is a matter of *both... and*, and not a matter of *either...or*. Within the framework of relationship, the application of *either...or* may sound a logical sophistry passing over the heart of the matter on the ground - the reality of relationship.

Further, Christian identity cannot be simply an objectivist type to which I referred earlier. This is because a Christian is a *subject*, unlike an archeological object. In the identity of a Christian there is a growth as she discovers ever new dimensions of her Christian existence. Besides, the external circumstances and challenges play a very important role in as much as the Christian identity continues to evolve in constant interaction with these factors and forces. It means that the particular history, the context in which we are and operate are important in the development of Christian identity. In other words, Christian identity cannot be abstracted from the historical situatedness. The way we have interacted with our societies and cultures, peoples and traditions is part and parcel of our Christian identity. The interaction with the larger society and its history shapes and moulds our self-understanding as Christians, which keeps growing and changing. This is different from an abstract and dehistoricized identity cast in an essentialist mould. It means in the

concrete that in our Asian societies we cannot define our Christian identity independently of our historical and concrete relationship with our neighbours of other faiths and their spiritual experiences ; nor can we think of our Christian identity independent of the history of our countries, our cultures and traditions which themselves are in a dynamic process of evolution.

Asian Re-appropriation of Christianity in the Contemporary Global context

The question of Christian identity in higher education needs to be inspired by re-appropriating the Christian message and its spirit in relation to contemporary Asia. In this connection I am becoming more and more convinced that what our neighbours of other faiths have learnt by themselves from the Gospel has wider and more effective significance in the larger society than what Christianity has been able to impart in terms of its specificity and identity during the past several centuries. The spirit of the Gospel has found its way deeper into the society whenever our neighbours have tried to understand the identity of Christianity by relating themselves to the Gospel through their questions and their concrete historical situations.

My intense conversations with peoples of other faiths and my experience and reflections with the present socio-political situation in our Asian societies, lead me to think of at least five major areas which our neighbours may identify in Christianity as something very important in the present day context. These are also the ideals which we need to weave into the texture of the Christian identity of our institutions of higher education, and insert them (institutions) in context so as to respond to the great spiritual challenges of our societies.

i) A New Humanism

Christianity is humanism in its deepest self. This is not a humanism which opposes human beings and the divine mystery as if they were two poles. As one of the early Christian fathers noted, "Glory of God is human being fully alive" (Irenaeus). Further, Christianity stands for the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbour. In fact, love of God is interpreted and "tested" through the love of neighbour.⁷

7 Cf. Günther Bornkam, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995, p.109 ff.

Moreover, the transcendent is accessible to human beings only through the concreteness of the history of human beings. That is what the mystery of incarnation tells us. "Only someone who forgets that the essence of man is to be unbounded . . . can suppose that it is impossible for there to be a man, who, *precisely by being man in the fullest sense* . . . is God's Existence in the world".⁸

Central to this humanism is the equality of all human beings transcending caste, race, religion, language, nation, etc. This is based on the truth that human beings are all without any difference and distinction the image of God.

In the Asian societies in which we experience increasingly the hierarchization of the humans according to high and low (class, caste, gender, race), the vision of basic equality of all human beings remains something we need to appropriate from the Gospel and relate it to our societies.⁹ As one of our neighbours of other faiths noted, "Hinduism has learnt one great thing from Christianity...[T]he ideal that Hinduism got from Christianity was that the way of God lies through the service of man. The emphasis on *seva*, the service of man as a method of realizing God came through our contact with Christianity".¹⁰ We are able to note significant currents and movements which, drawing from the traditional heritage, try to interpret the Asian religious traditions in humanistic key in order to respond to contemporary challenges.¹¹

8 Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, p.184, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961 - emphasis added. The deep humanism involved in the central Christian mystery of incarnation was brought out from a different perspective by Friedrich Schleiermacher when he wrote in early nineteenth century, saying about Jesus that "the constant potency of his God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in him" (cf. *The Christian Faith*, T & T Clark, 1989, p. 374).

9 In nineteenth century India, Keshub Chandra Sen – a towering intellectual in the Brahmo Samaj - was a great seeker of the Gospel, and it is so very difficult to fix his religious identity. What attracted him to Christ was the "*divine humanity*", and it served him as a key concept for the interpretation of Christianity. Cf. Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, ISPCK, Delhi, 2000, p. 29.

10 J.P. Naik, "The Role and Problems of Private Enterprise in Education", in *The Christian College and National Development*, CLS, Chennai, 1967, p.134.

ii) *The Principle of Privileging the Least*

New humanism and the equality of all human beings are bound to remain vague ideals or commonplace rhetoric unless they are translated into praxis. The message of Jesus as we find in the Gospels, gives us an operative principle that is radical in its nature and reach. It is the principle which maintains that a society, a people, a nation is to be judged on the basis of how it treats its least ones. Jesus tells us that it is not only a matter of paying attention to the least. He is most radical when he reverses the standards of power-operation, as we find in his "*parables of reversal*" (cf. Mt 20: 1-15; Lk 15: 11-32; Lk 18: 9-14). According to him, the last are the ones who are to be privileged – to be the first – precisely because of their powerlessness and vulnerability.¹²

This dimension of the Christian message seems to be highly relevant in our Asian societies at this moment, and it needs to be applied in every sector of life, including education. It may be pointed out that Gandhi was so much influenced by John Ruskin's work "*Unto this Last*" that he translated it into Gujarati. It is a work that challenges the mechanistic economy and argues for solidarity and social justice. It is well-known that the work of Ruskin was very much under the influence of the Gospel sense of justice in contrast to the then prevailing political economy based on crass individualism.

This principle of privileging the least contrasts diametrically with the liberal utilitarianism directing the process of globalization. Utilitarianism advocates the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. It does not matter if forty-nine per cent of people are left aside to starve and die as long as the system is able to take care of the happiness of fifty-one per cent. The Gospel principle instead starts from the other end – from the side of the victims, from those vulnerable and those powerless, and places their concern and well-being in the foreground in such a way that in a society no one will be left behind,

11 This is true of Buddhism, and of Hinduism, specially in the current of thought as interpreted by Swami Vivekananda.

12 Felix Wilfred, "The Margins: The Site of God's Visitation", in *Third Millennium*, vol. 11 (199) 4, pp. 110-117.

and every one will be cared for. The privileging of the least is intimately connected with a life of solidarity. All this of course, has its applications in the educational sector, in framing policies and practicing them.

iii) A New Image of the Divine

As the sociology of religion tells us there is a correlation between the condition of a society and its projection of the image of God. It is clear, for example, that a feudal society will value the image of God associated with power and authority, pomp and pageantry. It is an "Almighty" or "All Powerful" God.

It has been the constant temptation of all societies to project also a hierarchy in the Divine sphere. This was also the case in the history of Christianity when, the so-called *subordinationism* was proposed as a theory to understand the relationship within the Trinity. That was an attempt to deny equality in the community of the Trinity.¹³ It hierarchized the relationship of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. But basing on the Gospels, Christianity has maintained the equality of all the three persons in the Trinity. For they are a communion, and there is no high and low among them. The image of the Divine remains the model and pattern for egalitarian relationships in human societies.

There is another point in the understanding of the divine image to which we need to pay attention. Corresponding to the call to privilege the least, the image of God Jesus gives us is one who goes after the one lost sheep out of hundred. God is the one who searches for the lost coin and receives with so much of love and compassion the prodigal son (cf. Lk. 15: 11-32). This is very different from the traditional image of God associated with self-righteousness and observance of law and retribution. Jesus invites the disciples to "be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful" (Mt 5: 48), something the disciples have to practice in their lives.

iv) A New Universalism

In contrast to the Old Testament vision of a universality (cf. Is. 60), which expected that all the peoples journey to Zion with their riches (a centri-petal movement), the universalism of Jesus is one which reaches

13 Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Harper Collins, New York, 1978 (revised edition).

out to the other (centrifugal movement). In that sense, any movement of universality is divine in as much it reflects the mystery of God who reaches out to us in compassion and grace, even before we seek God. Jesus precisely represents this universality of God from whose kingdom no one is excluded. On the contrary Jesus challenges those who limit the divine blessings within the confines of one's ethnic, cultural and religious world. "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 8:11). Many episodes in the Gospel illustrate how Jesus was a man who moved constantly beyond the boundaries.

Today the Christian identity in Asia will be borne witness to in the ability of the Churches and their institutions to reach out and dialogue with the wider society, with the religious traditions and cultures. Christianity will give expression to the Gospel-universality by excluding no people or group and no cultures or religious tradition. The breadth of openness and universality will be the measure of the appropriation of Christianity in Asia.

v) Sabbath is for Human Person

In these times of globalization when everything is turned into instruments for a goal, we are reminded of another central message of the Gospel. It is the truth that human persons can never be instrumentalized; they are end in themselves. The ethical principle which gives absolute value to human beings and relative value to all other things – laws, institutions, traditions, etc. – will serve as an important guiding principle. A re-appropriation of this ethical message in the Asian context will have a transforming effect both within the Christian community and the society to which it is called upon to serve. Through this principle the new humanism I mentioned earlier gets affirmed and reinvigorated. In the educational field it means that we need to shift from the present trend of commercialization of education to focus attention on human persons as the goal of education.

II. Development of Christian Identity Through Prophecy and Negotiation

Concretely the Christian identity is to be revealed through our interaction in the present-day socio-political context. I believe that our Christian identity in this context will be manifest in the concrete response

we make to the developments and processes in our societies. Asian Christian prophetism will acquire its singular character in the way of negotiating with the neighbours of other faiths. The dialectics of these two processes – prophecy and negotiation - will go to form the texture of our identity.

Let me spell out, first, the implications of the prophetic spirit in education through three brief reflections. One thing which characterizes the scene of higher education in all our Asian societies is that of globalization. This overall situation is the background to my reflections on prophetism with reference to education.

1. Knowledge is Power

In one sense, globalization process continues the project of modernity. Francis Bacon at the dawn of the modern world stated “Knowledge is power”. That was a programmatic statement which energized individuals and communities to seek knowledge. More knowledge meant more share in power. This kind of world-view led to the birth of science and technology as a means to know the laws of nature and to be able to control it. Participation in the world of modernity and share in its benefits meant that people need to equip themselves with knowledge.

What does it mean for today? We face the task of bringing more and more people, specially the marginalized, to the sphere of higher education. This needs to be underlined in the present-day globalizing context marked by crass bourgeois individualism that zealously guards the benefits of knowledge to a privileged few, to the exclusion of many.¹⁴

By making higher education accessible to more and more segments of people, Christian institutions will also try to make up for the imbalance created in inter-human relationships by modernity. Making available higher education for those at the margins is to empower them and to create leaders among them. At a time when knowledge is sought as a means of power – economic, technological, etc. – there is the trend to monopolize it for one’s benefit. The lack of interest on the part of upper castes and classes for the higher education of the marginalized can be

14 Certainly the revolution in communication that has been effected by globalization is something to be appreciated. However, we cannot remain under its spell, but should address the devastating consequences globalization is effecting all over the world, and in Asian societies in particular.

explained from this perspective. The Christian identity and prophetic character will be manifest wherever there is a serious involvement for the higher education of the marginalized groups such as the tribals and dalits. The absence of this practice in any institution of higher education, even if it is managed by Church-agents, will amount to also the loss of Christian identity and prophetism. Those educational institutions failing to follow this orientation will be Christian in name but not in reality. These are the times when higher education is getting more and more concentrated in the urban areas and is attuned to city elites. Prophetic Christian approach would when this trend is reversed in favour of the neglected rural areas and countryside. In this way, students from the lower strata of the society will be truly at home – in every sense – with higher education, and will not have to be uprooted and alienated.

2. Power Produces and conditions Knowledge

The global developments have led us to a new realization regarding knowledge: “Knowledge is power” is only partially true. Our present experiences all over the world tell us that, to have access to knowledge is a matter of having power. This is another side of the intimate link between power and knowledge. If there is no economic power, a person remains excluded from the network of knowledge. In a world of education which relies more and more on interlinking and on electronic and digital communication, there are millions of people in our Asian societies who have no access to these means. Economic powerlessness deprives many young women and men from the pursuit of higher education. There is, as Paolo Freire noted, a “nutritious approach to education”, by which those who have power are fed and over-fed to become “intellectually fat”.¹⁵ On the other hand because of sheer lack of power, those at the margins of the society are made to starve.

There is another serious issue which bears upon the nexus of power and knowledge. As in every other sector, those who wield power define education and determine its content, methods, etc. Naturally, the wielders of power will opt for a kind of education that will reproduce the present society and the benefits they can derive from the maintenance of the status quo. The powers that be will see to it that the knowledge produced

15 Paolo Freire, *Education for Liberation and Community*, Australian Council of Churches, Melbourne, 1974.

and transmitted does not in any way challenge the present order of things. In other words, *those who control education are also the very ones who control the society*. Education serves in their hands as an important ideological weapon and a means of power.

If Christianity is for the change of the present order, because behind it lurks many injustices, then the natural course for any Christian educational enterprise would be to challenge the mode of education that serves the status quo. The status quo is one of globalization kept in place through the agency of the market. The prophetic challenge for the Christian institutions is to swim against the current and project a policy re-orientation of education that will go to effect transformations in the society. Christian institutions of higher education are *Christian* to the extent they are vibrant centers for social, cultural and political transformation.

3. Education from a global commodity to a means of Emancipation

Knowledge has a sacred character, and it should serve the cause of freedom. As there is a connection between knowledge and power, so too there is an intimate link between knowledge and freedom. Since knowledge leads to emancipation, it is viewed as something sacred. In fact, in most religious traditions of the world there has been the conviction that knowledge is something sacred in itself.¹⁶ There is also another reason for the sacred character of knowledge: Knowledge is said to derive from the divine light. Modernity was a departure from this tradition of sacredness and freedom. Globalization has completed this process. There is not only a profanation of knowledge, but education is pursued chiefly to further individualism and to enhance the earning capacity of an individual. As a result, the standard of higher education has become one in which those areas and subjects which would bring greater economic prospects are preferred and selected.

In this context, would not our institutions demonstrate themselves Christian when they take up an orientation in which education will truly lead to the goal of emancipation? "And you will know the truth, and the

16 Cf. The Gifford Lectures (1981) of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Crossroad, New York, 1981.

truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32).

One may argue that sciences are objective in nature, and they follow their own laws and logic. But sociology of knowledge would seriously dispute a position of "*neutrality*" of knowledge, and thinkers sensitive to the present plight of humanity would challenge this reductionist pursuit of knowledge at the cost of the human.¹⁷ In other words, we need to raise the question of the very intention and purpose of study and research.¹⁸ Our educational system could today cater to the demands of the market, by pursuing those studies and researches which are in demand.

In this sense, globalization, the new avatar of capitalism, seems to be at home with a certain mechanistic approach to science, devoid of the human and human intentionality. But in studies and researches themselves there could be certain clear options. For example, a huge amount of money may be invested in research going into "viagra" – of course they are researches and very scientific. This research could be pursued when one may need only a much smaller amount of money to research into the areas of preventive medicine against certain tropical diseases which can save the lives of millions of people. This latter type of education and research – no less scientific – is it not emancipatory in nature? Any educational policy or research which does not go into such questions simply would lack seriousness, even if they are purportedly very "scientific". We just cannot sit back and applaud the scientific character of researches into the technology of death (pursued for promoting arms industry) forgetting the human intentionality connected with these type of researches. In other words, today's higher education should relate, research and study to such critical questions as meaning, purpose and intention of the scientific pursuit. That will open up the path of education as an emancipatory endeavour.

17 This tendency came to the fore by modeling social sciences on the natural sciences. Charles Taylor advocates strongly the need for the *human* dimension in all human sciences. Cf. Thomas Gil, *The Hermeneutical Anthropology of Charles Taylor*, in *Concilium* 2000/2, pp. 49-58.

18 Felix Wilfred, "The Struggle of Liberation Theology for a New Paradigm: Any Lessons for Social Sciences?", in *Review of Development and Change* [Madras Institute of Development Studies], vol. IV, no. 1, pp.121-148.

The repercussion of globalization on education can be witnessed in the change of educational policies of many of our states. These policies go along commercial lines, and are dictated by undiluted pragmatism. In those countries where governments have been very much involved in higher education through funds and support are today withdrawing from this sector. Education is left to be managed and funded by industries and multinationals. Naturally, the type of education and the research these agents would like to have is one which is geared to their profit-making. The expectations from the educational institutions are customer-satisfaction, and this latter identified with the enhancement of the ability for profit-making. In this sense, education is pulled down from its sacred niche to become one more player in the market place. Education is on sale, for a prize – to be sure.

Of course, more often than not, individual Christian institutions feel helpless to resist the dominant trend. And yet, they cannot renounce their prophetic call as Christians to challenge such public policies of the state on education. The more Christian educational institutions become pliable and submit themselves to such policies, it becomes easy for the state to accomplish its own goals. In the colonial times, the Christian higher educational institutions, if not in intent, in effect served the cause of the colonial regimes. This is ironic because the initial efforts of the missionaries seems to have been along the lines of bringing literacy and education among the poor in villages. But then the missionaries turned to elitist oriented urban higher education falling in line with the state policies, while hoping that this accommodation would serve their (missionaries') evangelical purpose of bringing through the mediation of the elite more of poor people into the Christian fold. Obviously, there were some fringe benefits which accrued. In retrospect it appears how important it is to be critical vis a vis state policies on education if it were to be truly a means of emancipation for the poor and the marginalized.

The Christian institutions are facing another turning point when the states seem to be intent on converting education into an instrument of globalization. It is at this juncture, that the Christian educational institutions need to widen their horizon and project alternatives to the present trends, placing in the foreground the concerns and interests of those at the margins of the society. Today, if Christian institutions are

not to become tools in the hands of the state and the agents of globalization (thus repeating the past mistake of accommodation), they need to become critical and resist the anti-poor educational policies. Even more, these institutions should help re-orient the educational policies of our countries. The policies of the state and the condition of the Christian education differ very much from country to country. But one thing on which there needs to be convergence for all the Christian institutions of higher education in Asia is to empower the poor and the victims of our societies through higher education. That should be also the perspective from which to evaluate and critique state policies on higher education.¹⁹

Negotiation : Education for Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Understanding, Peace and Tolerance

As I observed earlier, the prophetic dimension should be coupled with the aspect of negotiation. By negotiation is meant the ability for border-crossing. It is very indispensable for education in multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies as our Asian societies are.

One of the important means of the social and above all mental flexibility is to lead the students to a knowledge about the various religious traditions in a spirit of openness. This is different from confessional religious education in which a student learns about her own religious tradition as a believer. While not excluding this, what needs to be envisaged today is a religious education with knowledge of other religions which will help the students to move across the religious borders and understand peoples of other faiths or of no faith.

Asia, the continent of world religions, has as its great heritage, religious tolerance and understanding. Christian institutions need to imbibe this spirit and transmit the same through their educational practices. Besides, these educational institutions should play a public function. The educational initiatives oriented towards inter-religious understanding will be an occasion to bring to public awareness the

19 This needs to be underlined at a time when in countries like India the attention of Christian institutions is almost exclusively turned on the question of minority rights. This concern is quite legitimate with a lot of practical implications in day to day running of the educational institutions. However, what should concern the Christian educators and the Christian community even more is the advent of the anti-poor educational policies of the state.

transformation that has taken place within the mainline Christian Churches during the past few decades regarding the relationship of Christianity to other religious traditions. This assumes great importance against the background in some of our countries where Christian institutions have been looked at as entertaining a negative view about other religions, and trying to impose on the students the study of the Bible, Christian doctrines and morals..

However, today, for those students seeking voluntarily deeper knowledge of Christianity, Christian educational institutions should be able to provide the means. In fact, there is such a great awakening and thirst for knowledge about Christianity in countries like China and Japan. The phenomenon of "*cultural Christians*", namely those who want to learn about Christianity as a cultural reality is on the increase.²⁰ They would like to bring into the intellectual and public life of their countries some of the Christian values and ideals. We also note how these intellectuals continue to publish works on Christian thought. Christian institutions of higher education in those countries where this phenomenon is at work could help those intellectuals in their pursuit by interacting with them. In this way, Christian higher educational institutions could become true centers of dialogue and meeting place of various movements and currents of thought.

Another dimension in cultivating relationship concerns the training and skills to be imparted to the students in the area of ethnic and religious harmony.²¹ Christian institutions should provide opportunities to students to learn, what I would call, *the art of negotiating the boundaries*, and reach out to the various groups and segments in the society. This calls for a *pedagogy of encounter*,²² and the skill for conflict-resolution.

20 It may be noted here that in mainland China there are state universities with departments of Christian Studies. The present author knows from personal contacts that some of those teaching Christianity themselves are not Christians, but are nevertheless experts deeply interested in Christian history, doctrines, culture and tradition.

21 Cf. Michael Paige (ed.), *Education for Intercultural Experience*, Intercultural Press, Inc., Yarmouth, 1993.

22 In the past, in its excessive zeal for orthodoxy this pedagogy was not developed in the Christian tradition. This could be seen also in the difficulties Christian educational institutions had vis a vis students of other faiths.

The seed of harmony sown through Christian education will bear fruit in the public sphere. In this context, we need to be reminded of the fact that UNESCO has specifically underlined the importance of education for peace and has taken several initiatives in the last few decades.²³ I had the privilege of addressing one of those UNESCO conferences held in Granada, Spain (1998). It is appropriate here to recall that the Constitution of UNESCO tells us that “*since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed*”. The chief instrument for the same is education.

The Christian character of the educational institutions should manifest itself in following these lofty ideals put forward by the world community. Solidarity with such a vision of education will speak of the Christian commitment to foster quality relationships at the local and global levels.

III. Seven Criteria to Identify the *Christian* Character of our Institutions

In line with what we have seen in terms of prophecy and negotiation, we can identify some concrete indices which will serve as points of reference to assess whether our colleges and other educational institutions are simply *de jure* Christian, or *de facto*. The following reflections are concretization of what I have called prophecy and negotiation.²⁴ Let me present here a few criteria against which the “Christian” character of a higher education need to be assessed.

1. The quality of Relationships

In the age of globalization it is important that our Christian educational institutions be ones in which we cultivate deep human relationships, and develop among students the necessary convictions and skills for solidarity. This relationship needs to be fostered at all

23 Cf. Among the numerous publications, cf. Symonides – Vladimir Volodin, *UNESCO and Human Rights. Standard-Setting Instruments, Major Meetings, Publications* (50th anniversary of UNESCO), Paris, 1996.

24 There are official ways of assessing the quality of education imparted, leading to accreditation. For example in India there is the body of NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) which evaluates against certain criteria. I would propose that there be some similar measures within the Christian Churches to assess and monitor the “*Christian*” character of the institutions.

levels – the relationships between teacher and students, staff and management. In a globalizing world which is turning education itself into a profitable industry, we need to underline the importance of inter-human relationships, personal attention, care and concern.²⁵ There is no need to belabour the point that the relationship between teacher and the student does not end with higher education. The student “*internalizes*” the teacher, and the relationship with the teacher becomes something enduring in one’s life.

2. Democratic and participatory practices

One of the serious consequence of globalization is that it erodes democracy and democratic institutions, contrary to the appearance. Globalization driven by financial capitalism seeks efficiency and prompt delivery of goods. Democracy and democratic processes seem to be an irritant for this purpose. Democracy with the participation of those involved is being replaced by “*management*”. The world and every aspect of life becomes objects of management in an “administered world” (Theodor Adorno). This kind of development can be seen also in the educational field. We note how the governments, under the influence of globalization are undermining the legitimate autonomy of the educational sector, and imposing its undemocratic ways. The temptation for Christian institutions is strong to follow unwittingly this undemocratic trend of our states tutored by globalization.

The Christian credentials of our institutions should be visible in as much as our institutions are run on democratic lines. They should reflect the spirit of participation. This has a long-lasting value in the education of our students. Our institutions could be run simply on managerial style, with no consultation, dialogue and participation of the staff and students. If we envision a democratic and participatory society, it is important that this be the milieu in which our students learn and grow. They will carry with them the democratic heritage, more than the grades.

25 Leslie Francis – Adrian Thatcher (eds), *Christian Perspectives for Education*, Fowler Wright Books, Leominster, 1990. “Both person-building and community-building are achieved through involvement in personal relationships, which, together with understanding, are central to a Christian view of education”. p.48.

3. Respect for Human Dignity and Rights

The process of globalization is heavily impinging upon human rights and its practice.²⁶ In its pragmatism and haste, it tramples under foot the dignity and rights of people. When success, efficiency and profit are the dominant mantras, the violation of human rights are perpetrated with impunity.

We know that for the past several decades the mainline Churches have consistently engaged themselves for the upholding of human rights in every segment of life. This is a necessary consequence flowing from the Gospel and its spirit. Besides, the secular world has become increasingly conscious of human rights and their violation. In this light, we may say that a Christian higher educational institution is one in which the dignity of everyone is respected and the rights of no one is violated. The relationship among the faculty, staff, students and management should be governed by respect for human person. So also, at a time when the dignity of workers and their rights are threatened in many ways, the Christian institutions are called upon to bear witness to their Christian character by respecting the rights of the faculty, which includes freedom of expression, association, etc.

4. Promotion of Secularism

If one were to say in nineteenth century France after the French revolution, that Christian higher education should promote secularism, that would have been anathema. Christianity and secularism were then poles apart.²⁷ But today, we live in a completely different context in Asia. In this new situation not only we can but we ought to pursue secularism as an important goal of education. There has taken place an Asian appropriation of secularism in relation to the context of our societies.²⁸ In earlier times when there was the suspicion that Christian educational institutions could turn out to be sectarian, some of the

26 Cf. Anthony Woodiwiss, *Globalisation, Human Rights and Labour Law in Pacific Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

27 Cf. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975.

28 Cf. Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999.

missionaries voiced the need for maintaining secularity in our institutions. At that time secular meant “neutrality”. It was a plea not to manifest externally any public religious symbols or ideology. But we have come a long way. And today, secularism is an important positive value like democracy. It is the defence against all kinds of fundamentalist trends. Our institutions need to provide the environment for a truly secular outlook. The problem faced by minority institutions in countries like India could be solved properly only when the secular forces are strengthened. Even from that point of view, it is important to train our students in the spirit of authentic secularism.

5. The ability to help overcome individualism by an ethic of responsibility

Modernity is marked by a strong sense of individualism, and globalization through its economic agenda has cemented this individualism. Autonomy of the person is a positive value and to be cherished, because it is a matter of true freedom allowing a person to grow fully without being coerced and hindered. But the individualism globalization is promoting is one that is centered on the self and its gratification. The kind of education which globalization and market require is one which will enable individuals to compete and outdo others. Do our Christian institutions want to be the nurseries for the creation of self-seeking individuals? Should we not underline the ethical responsibility towards the other,²⁹ towards the community.³⁰ I think our institutions need to be such as will focus on solidarity and highlight the community-orientation of all education. The ethic of responsibility is one which will impel the students passing through the portals of Christian educational institutions, to intervene effectively in public sphere.

6. Socially and Politically Conscious Education

One of the things which globalization has effected is anesthetizing the social consciousness. Besides there is a circumventing of the political process. We know how important political process is in terms of sharing power and resolution of issues. In keeping with its spirit of pragmatism

29 Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Claretian Publications, Manila, 1997.

30 Cf. Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 1998.

and individualism, glóbalization tends to keep the larger social and political issues outside the ambit of education. The responsibility towards the community and practice of solidarity, to which I referred earlier, could become effective only when deep social consciousness among our students and the staff is nurtured. Sense of justice and equity should inspire the policy-making and process of education.³¹

The bourgeois higher education of today is one which is politically and socially "illiterate" in spite of all its impressive specializations.³² The lack of social and political awareness makes the teachers and students into simple transmitters and recipients of a bundle of information with no regard to the social significance of the knowledge produced and transmitted. This makes easy to preserve unaltered the class and caste structure of our societies. Is it not then the serious obligation of Christian institutions to instill a *critical sense* about the society and free the students from the social and political naiveté which the present educational system seems to encourage? I think more than ever before a critical social consciousness is required precisely because globalization through its philosophy of individualism and its consumerist allurements functions as a deterrent of social consciousness.

7. Privileging the Margins

Speaking of the Christian identity criteria, we cannot but recall the dramatic narration in the Gospel of Mathew on the last judgement (Mt 25). What we note here is a problem of *identity*. Those who are saved are said to have done something without realizing the identity of the ones for whom they did it. On the other hand, those who are damned deserved that status for not having identified and done what they ought to have done.

It has been the constant conviction of Christianity that the poor represent Christ, and this awareness acquired greater sharpness in certain epochs. In Medieval times, as Michel Mollat enlightens us, the poor

31 In this connection we may recall Gandhi's vision of education which was bound up with the ideal of *sarvodaya* (the welfare of all). Cf. Glyn Richards, *Gandhi's Philosophy of Education*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, '01, pp. 16ff.

32 Cf. Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Herder & Herder, N. York, 1972.

were considered as “*vicarius Christi*” – the vicar of Christ.³³ Such was the consciousness of saints and sages that they saw in the poor Christ himself. I think there is no better and more convincing criteria for our Christian educational institutions than the way they care effectively for the poor and the underprivileged in the society. In the past, a major orientation was constituted by the so-called theory of diffusion. According to it, our educational institutions should cater to the elites who in turn will influence other classes of people. But we know from the experience of more than a century that such a “trickle down” approach to education does not bring about the projected goal. Studying the role of missionaries in education J.C. Ingelby comments upon this theory saying,

It could be said that because the missionaries tended to concentrate their education on the rich they were unable to make their educational stance sufficiently radical. Education was offered to the higher castes who were then invited to take what *they* wanted from it without having to forgo their essential elitism.³⁴

Our education acquires a radical character only when we direct it to the poorest of the poor in the society. That is very much in keeping with the spirit of Christianity. When this fails we will become pliable tools in the hands of the state and the elite to fulfill their goal of maximizing their advantages. The Christian character should be seen today in our ability to create leaders out of the underprivileged. In this connection let me refer to what Kancha Ilaiah, someone of *shudra* origin in Indian society has to say about the present condition of education. He notes how the method, content and orientation of education does not reflect the experiences of the marginal groups and peoples. As someone belonging to one of the lowest castes, what he observes regarding his own experience of higher education is very revealing:

“Later, as I pushed my way into the institutions of higher education at various levels, education began to appear more and more brahminical and anglicized. ...Moreover, the entire scope of

33 Michael Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages. An Essay in Social History*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London, 1986, pp.59ff.

34 J.C. Ingleby, *Missionaries, education and India*, ISPCK, Delhi, 2000, pp. 274-275.

education appears irrelevant. None of the skills we have, nothing of the knowledge we possess, have any place in the system. Worse still, our knowledge is rendered non-existent. Our linguistic skills and our vocabulary become invisible. We have been sitting in hostile anglicized and brahminical classroom that had been built only by extracting the surplus generated by our own parents.”³⁵

In this connection we need to review critically the attitude and assumption that intelligence is equal to fluency in English! Such a naïve assumption should give place to an attitude of valuing the innate abilities (*doctrina vim promovet insitam*) in the students from the lower strata of the society and from rural background. The city-bred students may wear their brain on their English tongues; not so the girls and boys from the countryside who are able to give expression to their innate genius and creativity in their mother tongue and native idiom.³⁶ All this has greater relevance in South Asia suffering from the linguistic legacy of colonial times, quite different from the situation in East and South East Asia.

Conclusion

Like the “*One Dimensional Man*” about whom Marcuse spoke in critique of modernity,³⁷ we need to speak of “*One Dimensional Education*” that is dominating our countries as a result of globalization. This dimension is obviously the economic one. Our Christian higher educational institutions cannot afford to be short-sighted and serve as handmaids of globalization and market to respond to its demands. If we look beyond the immediate moment, we will see that the perennial ideal of integral and wholistic education is and should remain the chief concern of our institutions of higher education. It is this integral education which will turn our efforts from being simply *education for livelihood to education for life*. The type of education we need to pursue is one which

35 Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu. Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, Samya, Calcutta '98(third reprint), pp. 54, 56.

36 Gandhi with reference to his own personal experience of an alienated education in foreign tongue, emphasized the importance of imparting education in the vernacular which will trigger the imaginative power in the students, as well as contribute to the development of the local language. Just as education needs to be related to the ideal of *sarvodaya*, so too, it should take place in the spirit of *swaraj*.

37 Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964.

will not go to reinforce the status quo, or turn education into a means of control of the society but serve for its true liberation.

Of course, I know the present condition with a lot of constraints and controls from different quarters, specially on the part of the state, has become critical and more difficult to put into effect the ideals of Christian education. But there is no room for despair. Otherwise we will fall into that sense of despondency which Noam Chomsky has called the TINA syndrome (There Is No Alternative). The point is to invent *spaces* within the constraints. If we are imaginative and inventive, surely we will identify spaces to come out with new initiatives in the educational field. But we need to go even further. Instead of becoming more and more pliant executors of an educational policy set by the power elites and the state, we should be able to jointly intervene in policy decisions on education. This presupposes a more significant and articulate Christian presence in the civil society for the common good. Through proper intervention in the civil society, we could effect changes in the educational policies.³⁸

Even as we grapple with the issue of the Christian identity in higher education, we need also to open up new avenues. The necessity for this has arisen from the critical situation in some of our countries in which the running of minority institution is becoming more and more problematic with the control of the state and due to other factors attendant on globalization. In this respect, two things seem to be important: We need to break our isolation., and tie up with and collaborate with people who have a different vision of education than the ruling paradigm, in such a way that our educational enterprise does not become a “function”, but really a “performance” affecting the society at large.³⁹ Secondly, there is the need of ever greater presence of committed Christians in institutions of higher learning run either by the state or by other private agencies. The witnessing presence of committed Christians can sometimes more effectively achieve the goals of education we are struggling to promote through our colleges and universities. The

38 Felix Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope*, ISPCK, Delhi, 200, specially chapter 8: Christianity Interlocutor in Civil Society, pp. 181ff.

39 Peter Beyer discussing the relationship between religion and globalization distinguishes between “function” and “performance”. According to him, if religion were to have any effect in contemporary society, it needs to relate itself to new social movements. This will contribute to its effective performance. See his *Religion and Globalization*, Sage Publications, London, 2000.

prophetic presence of a significant number of Christians will certainly make a lot of difference for the future of higher education in our Asian countries.

Putting into practice a broader and wholistic vision of education calls for serious commitment. Some years ago J.P. Naik, formerly advisor to Central Government of India, observed the following regarding Christian schools which can be applied equally to our colleges and other institutions of higher learning:

“Christian schools have been able to inject a large number of non-Christians with a sense of dedication and commitment to education. That has been a very major contribution. Commitment to education that comes from commitment to scholarship is a good thing. But when it comes from a stronger motive, like service to society or religion or God, I think the commitment is raised to an entirely different level altogether; and such commitment is what you have been able to achieve for a number of years and to communicate to others.”⁴⁰

Today, does not commitment often get interpreted as the *successful* running of our educational institutions? Where is the spirit of service if self-seeking (individual and collective) prevail?

Let me conclude with a little story which speaks by itself. Once upon a time, a Chinese scholar came on a visit to one of the renowned ancient universities of India. On arriving at the portals of the university, he entered into conversation with the watchman. The visiting Chinese scholar found unbelievable the breadth and depth of the knowledge the watchman possessed. He was curious and asked the watchman to what extent he was educated. To which the watchman replied. “Sir, I have three doctoral degrees”. The Chinese visitor was so amazed and thought to himself if the watchman of the university has three doctorates, how many more the vice-chancellor [president] of the university. He asked the watchman, “Sir, now tell me how many doctorates your vice-chancellor has?”. The watchman replied: “Sir, I am the watchman from today; till yesterday I was the vice-chancellor!”

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40 As quoted in Louis D'Silva, *The Christian Community and the National Mainstream*, Poona, n.d. p. 102.

Higher Education for the Poor in the Context of Globalization

**An Exclusive Interview with Prof. S. N. Hegde,
Vice-Chancellor, University of Mysore,
Compiled by Dr A.S. Dasan**

Prof. S.N.Hegde, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mysore - currently on his second term as Vice-Chancellor was interviewed exclusively for this number of *Jeevadhara* on Higher Education. Prof.S.N.Hegde is an academician of national stature and excellence. He is known, appreciated and respected for his conscientious thinking on cross-current issues and for his resolute promotion of interdisciplinary approaches to solving human problems. Dr Dasan who conducted this interview is a reader in the Dept. of English in the University of Mysore. He holds also additional charge as chairman of the Department of Studies in Christianity of the same university.

Today, globalization is one of the buzzwords that has come stay in the common parlance all over the world. A sort of unipolar vision of humanity vis-à-vis Western models of consumerism is being promoted as though local cultures and local ways of self-sustenance do not have much to contribute to human development. The Biblical vision of one world and one humanity with several races and variegated cultures exists only as a bookish value. Social transformation and goals of human development in terms of equity and holistic well being of all the people on earth still remain as distant dreams. For, one of the consequences of globalization is the perpetuation of the stories of underdevelopment and marginalization of the poor..

Higher education is being looked at more as a burden than a privilege. Even if the official claim of 65% literacy level in India were to be true,

it simply means that this percentage of the people could only read and write and know how to affix their signatures. For, higher education is available to 6.5 % only, and that too among this percentage of the population only. And brain drain has become an inevitable phenomenon because the degree and diploma-holders outnumber the availability of labour in the open market. It is preferred to having the brain in the drain. It is in this context that successful entrepreneurs like Narayan Murthy of Infosys has suggested reduction of subsidies for higher education and increase of resources for promotion of primary education.

Trends of globalization have also paved the way for privatization of higher education and it could mean further alienation of the poor and the underprivileged. Can the present-day higher education that gears and revolves round the interests of only those who believe in and can follow the path of the survival of the fittest ensure the creation of a new humanity free from poverty, exploitation and inhuman marginalization to which the poor are subjected? Today, we also speak of knowledge-based and skill-related survival of societies thanks to Information and Communication Technologies. And social scientists, activists, humanists and leaders of the voluntary sector plead for a conscience - keeping awareness of human goals, equitable distribution of resources, availability of opportunities and infra-structures and fair distribution of the fruits of development so as to reduce disparities and promote more or less even development.

What is in store for the poor, then? To extend and expand the question further, is there any taker to pursue the objective of creating a new humanity based on justice and common human fellowship? The poor today do not need rhetorical platitudes or ivory tower-discussions or pulpit-homilies. Poverty implies lack of choices, lack of proper distribution of resources, lack of information and infra-structure, and above all, lack of many freedoms - cultural, political, economic, psychological etc. Can globalization and higher education address these pertinent issues in all the forums available on earth? Can Information and Communication technologies be geared to serve as liberating agents? At the suggestion of Prof. Felix Wilfred and with the concerns as articulated above in mind, the following interview with Prof. Hegde was conducted .

Leadership crisis seems to be at the root of the present scenario of higher education. Would you like to comment?

Yes, we have leadership crisis not only in higher education but also in value-education, character formation, crystallization of ideas, discernment of visions and overall governance and performance. A good leader, instead of manipulating and controlling, encourages and inspires. He facilitates flowering and enables others to blossom. He identifies trends, has a long-sighted approach to the problems, formulates strategies with visionary attitudes, and sees everything in toto. Holism is the hallmark of his outlook and his visionary perspectives. He believes in using human resources by facilitating teamwork and gives directions, which are construed and received as guidelines for team-performance. Out-reaching by networking is another hallmark of his leadership. And above all, a good leader follows, listens, enlightens and leads people towards good citizenship and not necessarily towards politics and power. If we look from these perspectives, then leadership crisis is everywhere - in all fields all over the world - with exceptions here and there. Exceptions are a great sign of hope amidst several crises looming large.

According to you, what are the challenges before higher education today?

Higher Education is likely to be an international enterprise paving the way for global participation. India, being a signatory to GATT, cannot afford to treat higher education any more as a regional topic or workshop with ethnic, caste, linguistic and religious identities and considerations. We need to travel beyond these sorts of chauvinistic ghettos. Having been placed under international service sector, higher education is seen as a marketable commodity. It is going to be very expensive. Capital investment has to be massive with high-tech facilities used to kindle knowledge and impart useful skills.

With less and less Government subsidies, higher education is becoming an international business in the context of globalization. One positive implication is that this trend is going to put an enormous pressure on educational institutions to ensure quality and excellence in terms of teaching methods and learning devices. Functional autonomy and quality assurance are likely to hold the key for the future sustenance of educational institutions. Accreditation by multiple professional bodies will alone allow educational institutions to survive. The objective of

regulating policies of the State would be geared towards facilitating self-governance rather than indulging in controlling and constricting. It implies that there would be demand for more and more deemed universities, and it is, of course, better to have more deemed universities than doomed universities. Stagnant institutions or institutions of mediocrity are bound to die or succumb to decay. Quality, not quantity, in sustenance, maintenance and assurance would be on top priority. How well is an institution run? That would be the criterion for assessment. National accreditation is a welcome mode of assessing the worth of institutions of higher education. Ability for networking, competence for collaboration and partnership and valuing meritocracy rather than mediocrity are the likely indicators that would determine the quality of the institutions of higher education in the years to come.

If that is the case, who are the likely beneficiaries of higher education and how does it help the education of the masses?

As higher education is likely to be more and more a private corporate enterprise in the context of increased globalization, totally free higher education is neither possible nor necessary. Entrepreneurs and employers look for people who can perform. Degrees on paper are not sufficient credentials for eligibility or placement. Higher education would give rise to pragmatic scholarship and skills-developed knowledge societies, usher in the ignition of minds, so as to have dreams and visions for a better tomorrow. At the same time, it should be the social and moral obligation of the present and prospective entrepreneurs and employers to promote social action towards a new society built on humane values, morality, ethics and spirituality.

It is going to be an uphill task for the State - all the more so by virtue of the impact or fallout of the recent Supreme Court judgement on unaided and minority institutions - to cajole and persuade private managements or corporate bodies involved in higher education to take care of the poor and address the issues of social justice and social equity. Mere bureaucratic attitudes and ways of dealing with institutions of higher learning would not do any good, or result in positive thinking. The State could evolve certain ingenious ways of outreaching in terms of collaborating and networking with private institutions, corporate bodies, multinational corporations, philanthropists and other funding

agencies so as to develop the concept of good education and decent living for all.

It is true that only about 7% of the student population in the age group of 18-23 are in the realm of higher education. The State hopes to increase it to 15% by the year 2020. Universities and colleges alone cannot do this stupendous task. It cannot be achieved by increasing the number of universities and colleges, or by starting institutions with one or two class-rooms with leaking roofs and a few broken benches. It is imperative that distance-mode of learning and grass-root related and skill-oriented educational processes will have to be considerably expanded and strengthened. There is vast scope for distance-education, especially in a country like ours where the large chunks of the population live still in rural areas. If well conceived, it can reach the unreachable and help in the real transformation of rural India.

A holistic educational awareness with insistence on enlightenment and empowerment of the majority of the people can be the key for such a social transformation. Distance-education could cover and boost all aspects of life such as material, spiritual, moral, aesthetic, ecological etc. New approaches and strategies on health care systems, drinking water, public hygiene, simple sanitation and housing schemes could ignite the minds of the masses towards this kind of educational awareness. We have failed in this kind of planning. Educational institutions of all kinds should embark upon productive and skill-oriented education through distance-education programmes. China is a good example in this regard. The Chinese invest and concentrate on competence, and so the people in general do well there. Enlightenment vis-à-vis competence, not mere acquisition of knowledge or qualification or conferment of degrees, is the need of the hour. It is impractical and impossible to think of 100% mass higher education. No country has achieved this. It is not necessary. What is a must is good education for all and specialised higher education for those who are meritorious and who can contribute to the building up of the nation in varied fields.

To what extent does today's higher education take care of burning issues like social justice, equity and building up a new society with a human face?

On the basis of the principle and policy of good education and dignified living for all, the rich and the poor, it is the duty of the State to

ensure social equity to the extent possible. The philosophy of higher education should be that good education for all, the rich and the poor, pays rich dividends in a country like ours. The State could evolve certain social mechanisms like Higher Education Development Corporation for the Poor and the Needy with State funding and address those issues related to the vulnerability and the plight of the poor in the context of certain negative fallout of globalization. It has to be properly planned and implemented - not on the basis of mere charity but on the basis of social equity and equitable distribution of available resources. The poor too have the right to gain access to higher education. The talented ones among them have to be identified, encouraged and supported.

With the likelihood of market-driven forces ultimately deciding the fate, concerns and priorities of undergraduate and post-graduate education in the years to come, institutions of higher learning - universities and colleges - are expected to fend for themselves. Because of the resource crunch, it would be inevitable and wiser on the part of the Government to invest on primary and secondary education and distance-mode of learning programmes. Innovative and creative methods with scope for flexibility and periodic review of the efficacy of such methods and programmes need to be evolved while investing in primary and secondary levels of education. All major funding could be directed towards sustaining quality input at these stages, so that no resource is wasted and that such quality input facilitates and adds to the enrichment of the quality of higher education. The revision of the syllabi at all levels - from primary and higher education - should be in consonance with the spirit of holistic education. Any revision relevant to the changing conditions and signs of the time would have better survival value than others.

Unless basic needs are met, no educational system can boast of delivering good education. More and more students, for example, look towards and place their trust on NIIT and APTECH to equip themselves for a better tomorrow because these private educational agencies promise good and useful education. Good education is the key to prosperity and happiness. There cannot be moral or value education without good education - that too at the primary and secondary level. Even those who speak of moral or value education have received good education before they could speak of value education. Investing on good education that

would enable people to live with basic needs met is the wisest investment. Such education would lead to contentment.

What India requires are statesmen who can follow and lead the people towards common destiny through mainstream participation without alienating any section of the population. She looks for scientists and technocrats who can enhance the technological capabilities of the nation. She needs entrepreneurs who can contribute to the well being and happiness of the people. She calls for animators and activists who can steer the journey of people towards good citizenship with awareness of social obligations. And above all, she awaits visionaries who can impart cultural, ethical and spiritual values more by example than by preaching, which can sensitize and inspire the people towards decent living. Any education - formal or non-formal and primary or secondary or higher - that aims and aspires to achieve these goals is good education.

How do you look at the Minority Educational Institutions and their role ?

A good number of Minority Educational Institutions are already doing well. They are likely to do better in the light of the recent Supreme Court judgment. The judgment implies that they need neither to be tampered nor pampered. Quality input and excellence have always been the foremost concerns of these institutions. Christian Minority institutions have a great share of contribution in this regard. A number of private majority community educational institutions are also striving towards these goals. In the backdrop of the trends of globalization, these institutions need to strengthen their existential base with more doses of value education. With the help of their wards and their parents, they could launch and expand ventures of good education for the poor at the grass-roots level. They have better opportunities to integrate and involve both the rich and the poor students in such ventures. Concern for equity and access could go well with their option for the poor. They could initiate collaboration with government educational institutions by way of networking so as to reduce the mindset-distances between students of government and minority institutions.

Higher Education and Women

Opening a Window to Reality

Vasanthi Devi

The author of this contribution reflects very incisively upon one of the most important issues in present day education – the gender question. Dr Vasanthi Devi is an activist-academician and she is eminently qualified to critically reflect on the issue and to indicate pointers for the future. She draws on her experience as the former Vice-Chancellor of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, and her experience as the present Chairperson, Tamilnadu State Commission for Women. She is emphatic that higher education should be rooted in our social context, serve the community around, and take up larger issues. Foremost among these is the struggle of women for their liberation and empowerment. In this context, she questions the prevalent repressive practices and attitudes in the education of girl students, and underlines the importance of developing among them a critical sense and true freedom. Dr Vasanthi Devi was interviewed by Dr Gnana Patrick, a post-doctoral student in the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras.

Is higher education in our country sensitive to the gender issue?

Higher education, first of all, is not sensitised to social and political issues at large. So the question of its being gender sensitised does not even arise. A serious lacuna in higher education today is its alienation from the society, from the world around, from the community around. It exists in its own cloistered world, surrounded by high walls of alienation. I feel there is not even a window in these walls through which one can get a glimpse of the world outside. This alienation has been central to the ills of higher education.

If that is the case with social issues, I do not think it has been sensitive to gender issue either. Well, women certainly have entered higher education in large numbers and have made big strides in many areas. This certainly needs to be celebrated. When the international decade for women started, governments of countries used to quote the number of women in higher education as a very important indicator of their countrys' commitment to gender justice and gender empowerment. The rise in enrolment of women in higher education in India was very impressive. It could almost be said that the Indian Government was trying to use this data on the women in higher education to divert people's attention from the dismal levels of female literacy and its failure to create a literate nation.

However, we have to go a long way before higher education could become gender sensitive. In fact we have to gender-sensitise the curriculum and the campus culture. For the past fifteen years or so, women's studies' centres, courses and cells have been promoted by UGC, and a number of universities and colleges have incorporated them. Special women universities have come up along with a large number of women colleges in the country.

But whether all these have really resulted in contributing to the struggle for liberation of women in the country is a very big question. Leave alone the women in higher education contributing to the equality and justice for women of the marginalised sections, whether at all it liberates the consciousness of women who are the beneficiaries of higher education is itself doubtful. I do not think that, higher education, as it is designed today, can contribute to the empowerment of women, women as a whole. It empowers women who are in higher education, in a limited sense. It has opened out many undreamt of opportunities for them as far as career is concerned. Most of the areas of employment have now been opened for women; there are very few where women are totally excluded; more and more of male bastions have been falling. This is true. But whether these women, who have gone through higher education and also gone into employment as a result of higher education, embody in themselves the ideas of women's equality – justice to women, is a debatable question.

Tell us about your efforts at restructuring the curriculum at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, during your tenure as Vice Chancellor.

It was a big dream, a vision with which, a restructuring of the system of undergraduate education was taken up in the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, during my tenure as Vice Chancellor. The dream was to create a university system that would produce sensitive students with a critical perspective and social commitment. As a first step towards it we tried to open up a window, though a small window to the world outside. This restructuring entailed introduction of two more parts - Part IV and Part V - along with the usual three parts of the undergraduate programme of study. Among these two new parts, Part IV was called social value education course. We had initially introduced nine such courses among which were 'Status of Women in India', 'Consumer protection', 'Environment and Ecology', 'Secularism' 'Rural India' and so on. Each of these courses was supposed to open out one window, and through this window each student was supposed to get a glimpse of the world around and try to bring this glimpse to bear upon the understanding of herself/himself and of society. Her/his concept and construction of knowledge itself, we hoped, would be revolutionised through this small little window we opened out. However, the constraints in our rigidly structured system were so many that there was very little space in which these new experiments could be conducted. I had to do it without in any way upsetting the apple cart of our whole system. Because otherwise it would be difficult to carry the community of students, teachers and parents along with us. So, keeping the existing under-graduate system more or less intact, these new courses were introduced as additional components. That is how these part IV and part V were introduced. And, one way we tried to see that some weightage was given by the students and by the colleges to these two programmes was by giving them grades and making them required parts of the programme. So every student had to choose one of the courses and had to get marks, which were also included in their mark sheets. That was the most we could ensure.

We needed a long period of preparation for that. The teachers had to be taken into partnership in the experiments, their support won and their full co-operation ensured. And, we also had all kinds of bureaucratic

constraints - administrative, financial, etc. For example, to teach a course in a college on women-studies, we were not permitted to get a new teacher, who had specialised in it, as the govt. would not permit it. It was an affiliating university – there were sixty-five colleges spread across three districts, and it was not possible for those managements to appoint new teachers because no additional funding was available. So, the existing teachers had to be given some little orientation through a few short workshops and readings. With these we hoped that the teachers would be able to handle the requirements of these new courses. This itself was a very big constraint. The teachers in related disciplines, for example, the teachers in literature (English or Tamil), history, sociology, economics offered to take these courses. And even there, I would not say that there was a willingness on the part of all teachers to come forward to handle these courses. There were all kinds of non-academic and non-social concerns that really contributed to a particular teacher ultimately ending up teaching these courses. The university could not dictate this too much. We had to carry the colleges with us. In a college, if a particular teacher did not have additional workload, that teacher was asked to handle these courses. Now, a course like women-studies could not be taught unless there was a very serious intellectual and emotional commitment to it. It must, in fact, be a spiritual commitment. Among a large section of the teachers that commitment was just not there. So, it was a very weak experiment. As I said earlier, it was a dream, and we tried our best to materialise it. May be I am very unfair and I should not downplay its importance. But, at least, it was a beginning that could lead the way to many other innovations. It did make the students ask some questions.

How to relate the concerns of women to gain access to higher education, to employment- opportunities, etc., and the role of higher education to contribute to the empowerment of women?

Women are gaining access to higher education more or less on equal footing with men, and, the gender gap is narrowing. In a state like Tamil Nadu, the gender gap hardly exists in general education, except in professional education. In general education, women students have outnumbered men students, while in engineering and medical courses, there is still a gap, but the women are very fast catching up. This is only in comparison to men students. But the picture of general enrolment as

a whole is very dismal. The proportion of our youth in higher education is extremely low - just 6% of the age group of 18 to 23, which is among the lowest in the world. In developed countries it is something like seventy and eighty percent and more. In many other developing countries it is something like fourteen to fifteen percent. Six percent is really low. So, we have a very long way to go. Now we talk so much about the knowledge age, and the technology age. In this age, how can anyone cope with the demands and the challenges of the time, unless one is equipped with higher education? Higher education today is no longer a luxury; it is almost a need. Therefore, there has to be a lot more of expansion of higher education not only for women, but on the whole. One often hears the argument that our higher education has seen too much of a quantitative expansion. Of course, when compared to the dismal employment opportunities in our society, it might be said that we have a large number of educated unemployed youth. But that is no index of the need for higher education in the society.

If employment opportunities are not created for all these educated men and women, then there is something wrong with the whole path of economic development that the country has chosen. It is badly flawed. That is the reason why we are unable to absorb the educated and trained manpower. That is the only reason. So, the flaw lies there; not in education, and the solution is not in limiting the percentage of people in higher education. So, even in access, I would not say that we have attained much.

But when you come to the content, we have failed in formulating an education that would empower women, that would ensure justice, equality and continuous growth. This needs a complete revolutionising of our concept of education itself. This process has to set in, right from the time the child starts schooling. In institutions of higher education this will have to be reinforced and more vibrant, critical, and questioning human beings are to be produced. What we are doing in our higher education today is just churning out almost stereotyped women and men cast in uniform moulds, not well developed individuals.

In this context, critical education is absolutely necessary. To say that there is something like a non-critical education is a misnomer and a contradiction in terms. Education, by definition, should cultivate critical faculties. However the fact is that our education is by and large a non-

critical one. It does not cultivate a critical perspective and a critical outlook on life. That is why you have these unbelievable contradictions of highly educated women falling prey to such a lot of domestic violence, falling prey to dowry menace, etc. Many of our dowry-deaths occur among the educated women. We have inherited a feudal and a fiercely patriarchal system. Women are products of this system and those who come into higher education are no exception. But they have a greater responsibility to become pioneers in women's struggle for liberation.

As an activist, how do you see the contribution of higher education to the freedom of women?

I see myself more as an activist than as an academician. I have always tried to bring my activist concerns into my academic life. That is what I was trying to do as a Vice Chancellor. As an activist, one becomes acutely aware of the violence and injustice suffered by women. Many of the victims are graduates and they are in a state of utter helplessness. This whole system of patriarchy is not challenged in any way in our educational system. Our women colleges - men colleges too - but women colleges particularly, are very repressive. They do not permit the growth of the independent spirit of the students: girl students cannot ask questions; they cannot take up larger issues and discuss. Of course, they carry away the gold medals the universities offer. Any co-education college now would like to grab the girl students, because they are the medal winners! This shows that the women have enormous capacity.

But this capacity is not a guarantor of freedom. The subordination of women, the various institutions of subordination - none of these is questioned in the campus. We have any number of women's colleges where within the campus, very little of discussion of the vital issues that affect our young women can be carried out. Issues like dowry, relationships with boys - how gender relationship is to be understood, to be structured, etc - cannot be discussed. Within the college campus, these are all almost forbidden. One wonders whether one lives in a medieval age. Students are given no freedom. In a big metropolitan city like Chennai, perhaps the girl students get some amount of freedom, that too not in the campus, but outside of it. But in other cities, small towns or rural colleges, it is much worse. I was once asked to speak at a state level conference of women college students. A huge number of students participated. I was asked to bring a prepared speech. But I

started with asking some questions and one of the things I said was 'women colleges are very repressive places, and hostels are virtual prisons'. When I said that, the whole auditorium came down in applause. I did not realise that I had touched a very responsive cord almost in every girl student there. "It is true, it is true", everybody was shouting. Then I started asking them, "In how many hostels, letters that the girl students receive are given to them without being read by the hostel authorities?" The shocking truth came out that there was not a single college, where letters are given to the girl students without being censored. All of them said, in all their hostels, letters are read, censored, and then given to them. They are all *college* students and they are all *voters*. They have the right to vote and the right to choose the rulers of this country. But they do not have this minimal right given in any civilised society. Their right to privacy is not accepted, not recognised. Women are not considered persons, with their inviolable rights. So, what kind of freedom is possible, what kind of liberated women can we produce? Now, would you dare do this in any men's college? In any men's hostel? Where is the attempt made to build up the psyche of equality? The college authorities live in mortal fear of a breath of freedom that might blow into the women's college campus. How then do you expect girls to grow into leaders and champions of the rights of women?

**How are we to prepare the students to take
on the oppressive society and emerge as liberators?**

There must be an incorporation of a social dimension in all our programmes, in all our curricular programmes – in whatever course you are doing, even in engineering and medicine. It is not very difficult to incorporate a component. But this component once again should not become something like an examination-oriented course. In fact, we had a very big dilemma when we launched the restructuring that I mentioned earlier. In our academic council and senate discussions, we sincerely felt that making these courses like other courses with examinations would completely defeat the purpose of sensitising the students. But then we had to come down to the reality. If you do not have examinations, then, neither the individual student nor the institution would allocate any importance to this. No student would come to the class and the teacher will not be interested. Unfortunately we had to provide for examinations for Social Value Education courses, too. Instead of such a provision,

these must be courses where the students go out, go into the world and learn them out in the open, in the midst of life. In women-studies courses, they must go and observe the lives of women across the socio-economic spectrum and find out the living conditions of women, the injustices they suffer, the kind of violence they face, the utter destitution, deprivation that many of them live with, their daily, heroic struggles etc and write their own independent research papers. That is the way they can gain understanding of reality, gain insights and attempt construction of knowledge. We should not take students to be mere passive recipients of knowledge. They have a role in constructing knowledge. This active role as producers of knowledge will have to become central to the whole concept of higher education.

From the time they are in school, questioning and discussions should be fostered. Areas of our social and national life must be subjected to the critical examination of students without holding them up as holy cows. Let them question the traditions, social system, national policies, religion, every thing.. If Gujarat is not discussed today in a campus, what kind of students are we producing? Gujarat is the worst trauma that the country has gone through after the partition. We dare not even open our mouths in our colleges on this issue. Forget about Gujarat; there is not even a forum where these girls can openly speak about the many questions, the doubts that nag them, where they can share their own problems. Would the students and teachers be able to sit around and frankly discuss, in a non-hierarchical mode, personal as well as societal issues?

How to arrest the phenomenon of growing individualisation that takes place in the arena of higher education?

I particularly feel that every student must be a member of a larger movement outside. Wherever I address the women students, I tell them that this is the greatest insurance for their future. Neither their family, nor their colleges, nor any other institution will come to their rescue. Therefore their only insurance is to become a member of a movement. Unfortunately, the sections from which students enter the portals of education are politically conservative ones, and they are restrictive with regard to participation in movements. Institutions are also regimenting their students and they would not want to allow their students or teachers to join any movement. But unless the girl students join movements, I do not see any hope.

Higher education today causes the atomisation of students. This individualisation is a result of capitalism, privatisation, and globalisation, and of a fiercely competitive world into which the students are pushed. All these forces put together result in a single goal – *my individual achievements and building up my own individual career*. This process of atomisation is what is being celebrated today. A youngster who goes into different kinds of coaching classes, learns from the Net, prepares himself or herself feverishly to enter the globally competitive world, is the person who is the most celebrated, the roll model today, not one who feels concerned about social issues.

Internet is very much a symbol of the atomisation. It links you to the whole world outside, but your immediate world is cut off. The young student today keeps glued to the internet and his/her chats with everybody in the world goes on but his dialogue with the immediate world around is frozen. We certainly need to have our antenna put up as high as possible to draw positive impulses from all over the world. But if you need the antenna, you also need the windows to look at the immediate world. You cannot close all your windows and have only your antenna put up. But, that is exactly what is happening today.

What is desperately needed today as remedy is great movements of which the students are part. Here you find that the women from the lower and marginalised sections participate more in movements than the educated women do. If you take the college teachers in these movements, you will not see even a handful – neither in women's movements nor in any other larger movement. This is true also of college students. Since the NGO sector is becoming a job-providing sector, some educated women are moving in there. Otherwise, in no other way, are they getting involved. This is very dangerous and it will defeat the purpose of their own liberation and quest for equality.

How does the educational system today take care of the need of the women from the marginalised sections of our society?

Access to higher education to the women at the lower rungs of the society is very limited. We have the quotas and, Dalit and other category of students fill them as mandated. Now with the privatisation of education and with the self-financing system very much in its place, even that minimal safeguard we had is gone today. In all these self-financing colleges, very few women from the deprived sections, particularly from

the socially marginalised sections, are found. It is only in the government colleges and in the aided colleges that they had made bold to seek admission. How can they pay the enormous fees demanded in a self-financing institution? Privatisation of higher education is going to sharply increase the inequalities. More and more Dalit and very poor students are likely to be kept out of the higher educational system. In fact, whatever little democratisation was achieved in the field of education during the decades after independence is going to be lost. It is going to be still worse because of the way globalisation and privatisation are growing, and the way the state is withdrawing from the education sector, abdicating its responsibility.

How must an institution of higher education serve the people of the surrounding area where it is situated?

Higher education should be able to contribute to the social, economic and political development of the community around in every way. If you have a university in an area, the whole hinterland must benefit from it. It is the responsibility of the university to have organic links with the community. And the knowledge that radiates from this university must be able to have enormous empowering, liberating influence in the hinterland. But unfortunately, the few students who get into the campus from the community lose their roots very soon. They begin to lose their roots even when they are in high and higher secondary schools. It becomes a matter of gradual alienation than immersion into the problems of the community.

The curriculum must be constructed with relevance to the world around. This means your science and technology courses, social science courses must be designed to understand the problems of the community and address them. I have a favourite quote, from Einstein, that I had put up in my university :

“The concern for Man and his destiny is the main purpose of all education. Never forget it in the midst of your diagrams and equations.”

We need to redesign our programmes of study with this ideal as the guiding principle.

And then, such pursuit of knowledge must be carried out not in an attitude of arrogance and superiority, but in humility that any true search for knowledge should cultivate, taking the people into confidence, working in a participatory mode, along with people much less educated

or not educated at all. A respect for traditional knowledge systems, for experiential knowledge, must be cultivated. The world is coming round today to recognise the wisdom of traditional communities that lived in harmony with nature and environment. The women of agricultural and tribal communities had, all through history, been the innovators of agricultural practices, preservers of our forest wealth, of our precious gene resources, our bio-diversity. Our students should learn part of their lessons from them.

And then, well, you must be able to offer courses on our social structure, social dynamics, the construction of power relations, including gender relations that are power relations in patriarchy. We should be able to offer courses on caste, for instance. The Indian society is imbued with caste. Starting from marriage, it is present everywhere. But, how much is the caste issue discussed and how much does it constitute a part of our curriculum is a question. There are colleges where caste conflicts go on within the campuses, especially in the southern parts. May be the conflicts are not there in the women's colleges. But a discussion on the issue of caste is necessary in every college. We are very busy brushing our problems under the carpet and hoping that they would disappear by themselves. We are under estimating the capabilities of our students to come to terms with discussing these issues and see the reality face to face. Unless they do this, how are they going to counter them, challenge them, and overcome them? What is happening to our Dalits today? Oppression against them in some villages is so strong that they are not able even to contest elections. It is the Dalit women who are the worst oppressed, the worst exploited. All these issues need to become part of the curricular discourse.

What are the implications of the present-day saffronisation move to the cause of women?

Today, the agenda of Saffronisation has very ominous implications particularly for women. Emphasis on Hindu fundamentalism and going back to discover our Hindu traditions would certainly push women back into a traditional role. Wherever religious fundamentalism has reared its head, there women have lost out very heavily.

The project of defining the identity of an Indian is at the core of the saffronisation issue. For them, if we go back to Golwalkar, whoever accepts this land to be her *pitrubhoomi* or *punyabhoomi*, and whoever

has had undisrupted lineage from the Vedic period is Indian. Only such a person is a true Indian, while the others are there only on sufferance. This is very dangerous. In fact one of the very important values that we need to bring into our system for both men and women, particularly for women, would be the whole concept that India is a pluralist society. It is in the plurality that the greatness of India rests. It is not tolerance but a celebration of plurality and multi-culturality that defines the Indian identity. One of the nine social value courses we introduced in our university was secularism. Ours was the only university in the whole country that had introduced it!

In the whole enterprise of defining the Indian-ness, the identity of a woman is brutally dismissed. Unfortunately there is very little realisation of this, because women are being co-opted into the saffron brigade. We know what happened in Gujarat. Women are as communalised and they become as much virulent agents of communalisation as men. In fact, they internalise the values, and they bring up the children to hate and to identify somebody as the other. Saffronisation is a very divisive ideology and has many manifestations. One of them is the divisiveness between men and women, and this gender identity is being reinforced very much in a traditional mode. Of course, they would certainly allow the women to become pilots, to come to the highest level as the greatest scientist, etc. But the home is the responsibility of the women and traditional institutions should not be challenged by them.

We need to make them realise that everyone has multiple identities. In my case, why do I have to define myself primarily as a Hindu, a Muslim or a Christian? I am an educationist, I am a feminist, I am a Tamil, I am an Indian, and so on. There are any number of identities that I can give myself. I need not call myself a Hindu first. Saffronisation or Hindutva attempt at reinforcing a religious identity is planting an identity where such an identity does not even exist. People have lived in tolerance and in very easy multi-culturality. All that is now being broken up. But somehow when you make this religious appeal, it seems to have a very heady appeal to people. People get very easily co-opted. That is why in Gujarat, women were found egging on their men to go and vandalise the Muslim women. The most horrendous violence was that perpetuated on the bodies of the Muslim women. And what were the Hindutva women doing at that time? They did not respect the identity

of a woman. That you are a Hindu woman, you are a Muslim woman, Dalit woman, upper caste woman, etc stand out. The communal identities, caste identities and solidarities are stronger than gender identity, and gender solidarity. We have not succeeded in building a gender solidarity at all. The entire women movement has failed in building up a gender solidarity. Our solidarity does not reach across communal and caste divides. There is then a very big lesson that women-movements have to learn.

Another issue in education, that has vital implication to the issue of saffronisation, is the growing concentration of all authority in education in the hands of the federal govt. It is dysfunctional and also dangerous to permit the Centre to have so much powers to decide on the educational system. It is unbelievable that in a country of sub-continental proportions, with immense variety and regional differences, you have a system to legislate sitting in Delhi. It is preposterous even to think about it. The Constitution, in its wisdom, had placed education in the State List. It was only during emergency that it was brought into the concurrent list. It should go back totally to the state list. The centre should have absolutely no role except the funding role in education. If that is the case, this kind of distortions through saffronisation cannot happen. We have to take education completely out of their hands first of all. And then of course, it must be a very democratic process of evolving educational policies. Now the trend is the otherwise – more and more of centralisation. The CABE (Central Advisory Board of Education) was completely by-passed while formulating the controversial National Curriculum Framework for School Education. This is a violation of the entire federal principle. Today, universities are becoming redundant – all powers are getting concentrated in the hands of the central institutions like AICTE, UGC, NCTE and so on.

What should be the contribution of the Christian higher educational institutions to the empowerment of women?

No one can under estimate the great historic role Christian missionary effort has played in bringing the blessings of education to thousands of women, particularly of the lower levels of the caste society, and the dalits. But for the contribution of Christian missionaries, education that was the monopoly of the upper castes would never have been

available to the large mass of Indians, particularly women. Today a large number of women's colleges are run by Christians.

However, in empowering women in the true sense of the term, in women gaining liberation and equality, Christian institutions have been as much dismal failures as the non-Christian ones. The Christian establishment has been a very conservative one. Unfortunately, it is this establishment that runs the institutions. But you have today, another powerful trend in Christianity, of liberation theology, that has been contributing substantially in so many fields - working with the real wretched of the earth, working for Dalit upliftment, women upliftment, and so on. The commitment to liberation theology can be brought into the centre of education. If its substance and spirit can be incorporated into education, then it will revolutionise education itself. Particularly now when autonomous colleges are being promoted, some space is available for independent innovations for Christian institutions.

Of course, Christian institutions too work under tremendous constraints. The main constraint is to produce excellence, to produce excellence in a very limited and narrow way, and see that the students get into the most coveted jobs. And that is how the success of an institution is assessed. In such a milieu, it is not easy to swim against the current. Well, if at all anybody could initiate it, it is your institutions. Commitment to the liberation of the wretched and of the women needs to become part of the educational vision. These concerns should become core concerns in the building up of your curriculum. If you could do that, Christian institutions can play a very vital role.

I know that launching these experiments in today's adverse climate is difficult. But sometimes, this kind of moments in history must be grabbed as opportunities. When the minorities are being targeted today, in a communal atmosphere that is turning vicious, there must be a greater attempt on their part to reach out to other sections of the society, to the lower and poorer sections. In fact I find the Dalit groups and minorities coming together an encouraging sign today.

Have the Christians utilised the Minority Rights to the optimum for the empowerment of women and the lower classes?

Let me be frank and say that the Christians have not utilised the minority rights to the optimum for the empowerment of the marginalised and the women. Certainly it has been utilised to the extent that a large

number of Dalit students and other marginalised sections have been provided education by the minority institutions as no body else has done. But I do not think that this has resulted in questioning and breaking the status quo. Within the Church too there are caste and gender hierarchies. These are being perpetuated within the educational institutions too. Christian education does not encourage the child, the woman and the youth to question and challenge.

The minority rights, very often, have been misused, for example, to hire and fire teachers, because this is an area that the state cannot interfere with. It is because of such misuse, teachers' movements have been critical of the way minority rights have been exercised in educational institutions. The right to administer an institution is not the right to mal-administer an institution or deny rights of teachers and employees that are available in non-minority institutions. Very often, it is teachers and employees belonging to minority communities that are denied these rights in these institutions. The State must have that much of an authority over even minority institutions as to safeguard rights. But preserving the minority culture, propagating the minority culture within your institution – that certainly is a very sacred right that must be ensured. In this area, the minority right has been utilised to some extent.

Religious Nationalism Makes its Way to Higher Education A Secular Critique

Gnana Patrick

The author analyses a burning and hotly debated issue of education. He presents facts and figures to show us the anti-secular leanings of the present educational policies as revealed by the various measures taken by the state and the new courses being introduced. He is of the view that through the various stratagems used, the country is surreptitiously led away from the secular and scientific temper inherited at the time of Independence and followed in the immediate post-Independent period. The growing control over academic freedom of study and research and selective funding for projects, etc. stunt the scientific progress of the country and its development. He also highlights the fact that higher education – specially professional courses – are becoming more and more inaccessible to the poor strata of the society.

The five decades after Independence have seen a considerable growth in the number of higher educational institutions, such as universities and university-level institutions. From a small number of 32 in the year 1950-51, they have risen to 294 in the year 2002, showing an increase of 94 percent. The number of students enrolled for higher education has expanded from 1,73,696 in the year 1950-51 to 88,21,095 in 2002. "The higher education system has witnessed a 13-fold increase in the number of universities, 25-fold increase in the number of colleges, and 30-fold increase in the enrolment of students since Independence."¹ This is a substantial increase indeed! This is, among others, a marker of

1 Anitha Joshua, "The Lessons Remain to be Learnt," *The Hindu*, 5 January 2003, Chennai edition, p. 16.

the democratisation of educational opportunities achieved in the post-independent era. That these figures falter when considered in relation to the enormity of the actual need (for example, only 6% of the youth in the age group of 18-23 enter the higher educational institutions) is no argument to undermine the increase made in absolute numbers.

It may be said that this process of democratisation of educational opportunities has implied a certain rational organisation of the educational sphere of our country. This becomes clearer when looked at against the background of the millennia-old practice of maintaining education as an esoteric craft with exclusionary rights. In spite of the fact that the British colonial objectives and practice of higher education created only a group of inward-looking bureaucratic elite, that too 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste', the colonial intervention did set the centrifugal forces in motion around the axis of education. The sphere of education began to extend, in a wave-like fashion, incorporating the hitherto excluded social groups, making a space available for rational principles in the organisation of education.

This process was accompanied by a gradual blossoming of a secular perspective in education. By secular perspective, we understand a social philosophy, which, beyond the dichotomy between religious and non-religious, stands for a *rational approach* to life, with certain recognition of borders between the public and the private spheres, and which views religion as belonging to the private sphere. This perspective entails a basic respect and openness to all religions on the part of the political agency. Mukdishree Ghosh, who made a study on the development of the concept of secular education in India, opines that the concept of secular as understood by the people, involves "i. Respect for all religions, ii. Promotion of rational and objective outlook in life, iii. Freedom from all narrowness and fanaticism, iv. Tolerance of other's opinion, and v. Dutifulness to self and society."²

This process of blossoming of a secular perspective encounters adverse conditions today. A project of *instrumentalising* culture and education to the furtherance of political dominance is in its phase of accelerated execution today. This project creates adverse conditions to

2 Mukdishree Ghosh, *Concept of Secular Education in India*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1991, p. 317.

the unfolding of a secular perspective both in the educational sphere and in the society. The present article takes a brief look at some of the more conspicuous measures of this project in the area of higher education, and goes into some of their implications for a secular society.

‘Indianise, Nationalise and Spiritualise’

In recent years we are witnessing how Hindutva religious nationalism is making its way into the sphere of education. This is evident from the educational policies adopted by the ruling dispensation. Though initiated insidiously at an earlier period when Mr L.K. Advani was the Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister, the project was sought to be openly introduced into the field of education in and through a Conference of the State Educational Ministers and Secretaries held in October 1998 when Mr Murali Manohar Joshi was the HRD minister. Mr Murali Manohar Joshi came up with the agenda of discussing a report written on education by an expert group whose central proposal was to *Indianise, Nationalise* and *Spiritualise* the Indian education. It was spelt out into various steps such as introduction of lessons and courses on Indian philosophy, culture, etc., including incorporation of Vedas and Upanishads as core curricula and, making Sanskrit a compulsory subject right from the elementary level. That the report, along with the singing of *Saraswathi Vandana* in the meet, had to be withdrawn due to the strong objection raised by the Education ministers of non-BJP ruled States was only a momentary set-back to the project. But then, the thwarted introduction of the project at the Conference is taking hold of the educational system today as policy decisions from the Government.

‘National Curriculum Framework’ introduced in school education through the agency of the *National Council of Educational Research and Training* is only one expression of this project. It seeks to introduce a revised history to the school students. Some of the lessons of the revised history are: Aryans are the original inhabitants of India; Aryan civilisation is Indian civilisation; the rule of the ancient Hindu kings was the golden rule; the Mogul kings brought darkness and backwardness; Hinduism is identical with nationalism; Hedgewar, Golwalkar and Savarkar are among the greatest freedom fighters, and so on.

In the arena of higher education, the project of religious nationalism is pursued with scheme and vigour. The plan works at different levels:

one, at the level of introducing newer curricula, another, at the level of 'capturing' the higher educational premier institutions, yet another, at the level of funding researches and studies that suit the purpose, and finally, at the level of monitoring and restricting the movement of ideas.

Newer Curricula

In February 2001, the University Grants Commission announced that it was instituting in Universities new departments to study Vedic Astrology, named as *Jyotir Vigyan* – meaning, the illuminating science. The annexure to the announcement contained details on its rationale, scope, objective, etc. Some of the highlights of the stated rationale for doing so read as follows:

Vedic astrology is not only one of the main subjects of our traditional and classical knowledge but this is the discipline which lets us know the events happening in human life and in universe on time scale.

The distinguishing feature of this subject is that it makes us familiar with time, its nature and feature and its effects on human life and other events and that way it helps us to manage and make optimal utilisation of time.

It is a common feature that despite best methods adopted for estimation, the events happen in different ways and add to worries, tensions and frustration in life. Here Vedic Astrology can help to see the unforeseen, it being the subject dealing with time.

Starting of the courses in Vedic Astrology in Universities will not only impart the knowledge of this subject to the people but will also add a new dimension for research in the fields of Hindu-mathematics, Vastushastra, Meteorological Studies, Agricultural Science, Space Science, etc.³

Along with Vedic Astrology, another subject known as *Karmakand* (Vedic rituals) is also introduced in the universities as vocational courses. They are supposed to form part of the *Jyotir Vigyan*. The government paper justifying the teaching of *Karmakand* speaks about it as in the following lines:

3 Cited in Nalini Taneja, "The Saffronisation Agenda in Education – An exposé," *Internet Material*.

There is the concept of *rta* or harmony in the external world and the aim of education is to bring the whole man in tune with the *rta*...”

The idea behind *karmakand* is to capture this process in practical terms and utilise this method of learning to understand the scientific and traditional wisdom in diverse fields such as geometry, arithmetic, algebra, environment etc.⁴

Yet another subject to be introduced is Vedic mathematics. It claims that all mathematical knowledge is contained in the *Atharvaveda*. This was promoted as a course taking inspiration from a book by late Sri Bharathi Krishna Tirthaji Maharaja, Sankaracharya of Govardhana Matt of Puri. An attempt is said to be made to introduce the course in higher education, including in the IITs.

Vedic Astrology and Vedic mathematics have already been made part of the University education stream, and funds are allocated for the same, and around 24 Universities are said to have already accepted to run the courses. Incidentally, these courses are linked to the Sanskrit departments of the universities or colleges. Sanskrit, a language that is being referred to as the root, index and pristine form of ‘Indian culture’, is privileged and propagated through several methods. Departments of Sanskrit have been established in several universities apart from plans for four additional Sanskrit universities.

‘Capturing’ of Apex Bodies

As part of the stratagem of introducing the Hindutva version of nationalism, the agents of Hindutva have almost taken control of the several premier institutions of research and higher education. The *modus operandi* is eliminating the ‘adversaries’ from vital posts and placing instead the sympathisers to the cause of Hindutva. The most tragic victim of this exercise was the *Indian Council of Historical Research*. Great historians were either shown the door or were not allowed to continue for subsequent terms, which was possible as per conventions. The two volumes of the *Towards Freedom* project edited by K.N. Panikkar and Sumit Sarkar were withdrawn from publication with the allegation that they presented a distorted history. The *Indian Council*

for *Social Science Research (ICSSR)* has been similarly reconstituted. The *Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS)* in Simla has new chairman and members with same ideological leanings. The *Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA)*, established as an autonomous body in 1987, with broad guidelines on research and documentation, has been taken over and made as a centre for performing arts and for creation of literature on 'religious tourism'. The *Indian Institute of Mass Communication* that comes under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has been given a pro-Hindutva chairman. Several other institutes of research and higher learning including Libraries and Museums have gone the way of the religious nationalists.

Funding of Researches

Funding of researches, projects, excavations, seminars, conferences, etc., is another way of introducing the agenda of religious nationalism into higher education. Given below is a list of only some sample instances of funding: Funds have been allotted for archaeological excavations to prove the Aryan traces in the Indus Valley civilisation; Projects have been sanctioned to prove the existence of the mythical river *Saraswathi* and the civilisation supposed to have grown around it; The premier institute of the *Archaeological Survey of India* is engaged in funding excavations and publications to prove that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of this land and that the Indian civilisation is essentially Aryan; The *Harappan Gallery* in the *National Museum* in Delhi is made to assist the Hindutva propaganda on culture; The old and unclear photographs of hearths or tanks are labelled as 'fire altars' to make out a case that the Aryan fire worship existed in the Harappan civilisation; etc.

The *Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR)* is making available huge funds to the Shyama Prasad Mookhejee documentation centre and the Deen Dyal Upadhyaya Centre, established by the BJP Government. The government has pledged 40 million for a chair in the Oxford University on Indian history and culture. "In the areas of Science and technology there is a systematic shift in budgetary allocations to favour branches linked with military and nuclear research and development (R&D), and to the detriment of research and studies in the fields of agriculture, health, medicine, and a general science education."⁵

Thought Policing

Recently the Government came up with certain regulations that contribute to the restriction of the movement of scholars between countries. It laid conditions such as obtaining permission from the Government for inviting scholars from other countries to address seminars, workshops, conference, etc., under the pretext of national security. The circular intimating this regulation stated that foreign scholars “should not be generally considered to attend conferences of a political, semi-political, communal or religious nature.” Universities organising conferences on subjects “related to human rights or sensitive technical subjects, which can be utilised as a platform for any particular line of propaganda or where the subject matter ... is of a purely national or local character” were instructed to avoid foreign academics. Where inviting foreign nationals was unavoidable, the government proposed to examine the invitees before allowing or disallowing. These measures provoked protests and, in a subsequent step, the ‘other countries’ for which prior permission is required are shrunk to the neighbouring countries of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. In these cases, prior permission is required from the Home Ministry and the External Ministry, regardless of the subject of the conference. These measures are implemented for restricting the intellectual and cultural interactions between countries, especially of South Asia.

Along the same lines, the NCERT has given life to an old rule (rule 8 (2) of the CSS (Conduct) Rules of 1964) prohibiting government servants from publishing books or contributing articles without obtaining prior permission of the government or of the prescribed authority (*Times of India*, 08 July 2001).

These then are some of the measures pursued at different levels to implement the policy of *Indianising, nationalising and spiritualising* the Indian higher education. Implementation of these measures has grave consequences especially to the secular ideal that the Constitution of India pledges to promote.

Thwarting the Secular Legacy

It is now a considerable period since India has lived with the notion that education is secular. From Queen Victoria’s famous proclamation of 1858, the government of British India had adhered to the policy of neutrality and non-interference in matters of culture, religion, and

education. Muktishree Ghosh, based on her study on Indian education, points out that, "the policy of religious neutrality was strictly followed in all government schools in the pre-Independence period."⁶ This policy of neutrality contributed its share to the emergence of the understanding that education was secular.

More than the adoption of the policy, the very nature of the curricula such as mathematics, medicine, engineering, and other sciences had contributed to the growth of the secular education. Even in the princely states, adoption of similar curricula, under the impact of colonial education, had brought about a change in the vision of the hitherto religion-bound temple-mediated education. In addition to the policy and the nature of curricula, the secular spirit of education proved to be attractive to the people. In this connection, it is in place to hear the words of a native Christian missionary who reflected why the native Christians were not drawn to religious life even after concerted efforts by the missionaries: "Is it to be wondered at that the educated Indian Christian should be rather loath to devote himself to a purely religious life? Has not secular life on the very face of it infinitely larger attractions for him? ... Is it to be wondered at that he likes to become a doctor, a lawyer, a tahsilda, or an extra assistant commissioner, in preference to becoming a padre?"⁷

In short, a secular outlook, which came to mean "a wide catholicity of vision, a rational understanding of life and society, a vision of moral and universal reason, ...(and) love for truth, freedom of inquiry and freedom of thought,"⁸ came to inform the concept of education. A section of the Indian people, who later on came to play a vital role in the development of the independent India, was formed in this secular concept and ambience of education. They enshrined this concept in the Constitution of free India. So, we find Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, speaking about the identity of a university as: "a university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress,

6 Muktishree Ghosh, *Concept of Secular Education* ..., p. 315.

7 J.C. Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India – Issues in Protestant Missionary Education in the Long Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, p. 246.

8 Muktishree Ghosh, *Concept of Secular Education*..., 1991, p. 314.

for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards ever higher objectives.”⁹ Different commissions on education too acknowledged and stressed the need of preserving and promoting the secular nature of education. Dr S.V. Radhakrishnan, who headed the University Education Commission of 1948-49, in spite of suggesting an incorporation of the study of Indian religious and cultural heritage in the curriculum, pointed out that the religious instruction in education did not go against the fundamental principles of secularism such as freedom of Conscience, freedom of enquiry and moral solidarity. Having been anchored in secular perspective, academic freedom and rational outlook on knowledge, the centres of higher learning have been making sincere attempts in fulfilling the triple functions of *research, teaching and extension* (outreach) programmes expected of a university.

Standing at this juncture, we see the introduction of measures that drastically affect the nature of higher education. A shift of focus is sought to be initiated in the orientation of higher education: from promotion of scientific knowledge, development, social equity, social and economic upward mobility, democratisation of education, etc., to cultural heritage, nationalism, spirituality, indigenous knowledge, and so on. This shift seeks, among others, to thwart the secular legacy this country has inherited in the field of education.

Stunning the Scientific Progress

The project of religious nationalism introduced into higher education, when implemented vigorously, will contribute to a gradual stunning of the scientific spirit and progress achieved over a long period of time in the field of education. For a long time in history, universities, the centres of higher learning, have been known for their scientific enquiries and scientific researches. The curricula on Vedic astrology, Vedic mathematics, etc., to the contrary, are signposts for the atrophy of scientific spirit and knowledge. Vedic astrology, any astrology for that matter, is unscientific in form and content. It is in place to quote the

9 Cited in K.B. Powar, *Indian Higher Education – A Conglomerate of Concepts, Facts and Practices*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002, p. 34.

statement signed by 186 distinguished scientists including 18 Nobel Laureates in 1975 against astrology:

We, the undersigned – astronomers, astrophysicists, and scientists in other fields – wish to caution the public against the unquestioning acceptance of the predictions and advice given privately and publicly by astrologers. Those who wish to believe in astrology should realise that there is no scientific foundation for its tenets... In these uncertain times many long for the comfort of having guidance in making decisions. They would like to believe in a destiny predetermined by astral forces beyond their control. However, we must all face the world, and must realise that our futures lie in ourselves, and not in the stars.¹⁰

Vedic astrology, like any astrology, lacks scientific foundation as these distinguished scientists have noted. It is premised on occult belief and practice. Incidentally, one finds an ambiguity, perhaps wilfully maintained, in the campaign made for Vedic astrology. The ambiguity is in clarifying the distinction between the concepts of astrology and astronomy. While astrology is only an occult belief or practice claiming the secret knowledge of supernatural or magical influences due to the mythical planets, astronomy is a verifiable or falsifiable scientific knowledge about the spatial bodies. Interestingly, as indicated by Jayant V Narlikar, “a survey of Vedic literature does nowhere reveal the notion of nine planets and their supposed influence on human destiny.”¹¹ At the most, there are “references to omens and also to sacrifices to be performed at different times of the year as determined by the position of constellations.”¹² There is no reference in Vedic literature that speaks about the “occult influence of the planets” on human lives. On the other hand, one may find traces of *astronomy* which involved observations of stars, moon, and constellations and their use for time-keeping and calender making.

A comment by Nalini Taneja, a journalist, is worth noting: “It is incredible that the highest body in the country for higher education fails

10 As cited in Jayant V Narlikar, “Vedic Astrology or Jyotirvigyan – Neither Vedic nor Vigyan,” *EPW*, XXXVI, 24, p. 2113.

11 Jayant V Narlikar, *Ibid.*

12 – *Ibid.*

to distinguish between science and superstition or between science and ritual ... It has taken years of study, questioning, sacrifice and courage by mankind to liberate science from religion, to counter superstition, to draw a line between astronomy and astrology. The RSS in one stroke has acted against mankind's endeavour to understand the world and one's place in it, by denying knowledge arrived at after centuries of intellectual labour."¹³ By being a retrogressive curriculum, the Vedic astrology, therefore, is only going to contribute to the stunning of the scientific spirit achieved in this country through education.

Endangering Cultural Diversity

The policies of religious nationalism lay greater emphasis on Indian philosophy and culture. Extolling the pre-eminence of the Indian traditional wisdom, these policies seek to explore into it from the texts of Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Agamas, Puranas, Ithihasas, etc. which are the cultural and philosophical repertoire of the Sanskritic tradition. In their zeal for the treasure hunt of Indian traditional wisdom, the advocates of these policies are ever ready to find traces or roots of even the most recent inventions in the Vedas, Upanishads, etc. This tendency, apart from dwarfing the mind, is based on a selective reading of the cultural repertoire of this land.

In their recognition, the subaltern culture and philosophy do not measure up to the standard of wisdom. Kancha Illiah, a proponent of the subaltern life and culture, speaks of the need to explore into the wisdom of the people who erected a grand edifice of the *material civilisation*, such as the wisdom inherent in the invention of the wheel, the pots and other such implements. From the perspective of the labouring classes, the traditional wisdom is embedded not in the texts but more in the artefacts and implements. Would the Indian culture and philosophy spoken of by the recent policies focus their light on these areas?

Thus, privileging the Indian culture and philosophy has meant universalising or nationalising the Sanskritic tradition. This tradition finds its rhetoric in *one nation, one culture and one people*. That this project endangers the cultural diversity fostered in this country needs no restating.

Incidentally, while the Hindutva nationalists are pursuing the programme of mono-culturalism, other agencies that sustain cultural diversity are being weakened, diluted and undermined. The verdict given on 31 October 2002 by the eleven-judge bench of the Supreme Court on the rights of the religious and linguistic minorities to run educational institutions is a case in point. This verdict clearly restricts the freedom of the aided minority institutions, while granting unfettered freedom to unaided minority institutions, soliciting privatisation and commercialisation. Rajeev Dhavan points out perceptively that the judgement undermines the minority rights in a discreet manner.¹⁴ He points out that the provision in the judgement of greater State control on minority rights merely on the fact that they are 'being aided' goes against the spirit of the Constitution which provided for the minority rights primarily to foster the cultural diversity in this country. More State control on aided minority institutions, together with a push given to commercialisation in unaided minority institutions will only lead to difficulties in academic contributions for the sustenance and upkeep of minority cultures. This certainly is a sure way to weaken the agencies that maintain the identities of different cultures and thereby endanger cultural diversity.

Facing the Challenge

The Indian higher education system is faced with some real challenges. "How to meet the increasing demand for higher education, especially from the less-privileged sections of the society? ... How to improve the quality of education so that it can meet the demands of society and be internationally competitive? ... How to provide adequate funding to academic institutions without resorting to blatant privatisation (read commercialisation) of education? ..." ¹⁵ – are some of the challenges put forth by Prof. K.B. Power, the Secretary General of the Association of Indian Universities, as real challenges facing the Indian higher education. The inequality of access to higher education on the basis of gender and caste still existing in our democratic country is yet

14 Cf. Rajeev Dhavan, "The Minorities Case," *The Hindu*, 15 November 2002, Chennai Edition, p. 10

15 K.B. Powar, *Indian Higher Education...*, p. 23.

another real challenge facing us today. While in the general education, the ratio of enrolment between the general category and the scheduled Castes/Tribes category students has increased from 6.3:1 in 1957 to 7.2:1 in 1996, in the professional education it has decreased from 11.6 in 1957 to 8.7:1 in 1996. This simple fact reveals the serious lacuna existing in the problem of access and equity in education.

While these are some of the real issues, the higher education system is made to spend its energy and time implementing the agenda of religious nationalism. The danger implied in implementing the agenda is grave indeed. Unless faced squarely, the centres of higher education, instead of working for scientific knowledge and advancement, may end up serving the sectarian agenda of a political agency and thereby instilling hate into the social, cultural and political fabric of our country. The secular forces in the areas of education, culture, society and politics need to be united in facing the challenge.

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